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UNDINÉ:

THE SPIRIT OF THE WATERS.

UNDINÉ:

THE SPIRIT OF THE WATERS.

A Poem,

CONTAINING A VERSION

OF THE

NARRATIVE BY BARON DE LA MOTTE FOUQUÉ.

BY

WILLIAM HIPSLEY.

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

Tempest, Act iv.

LONDON:
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.
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Baron Fouqué's Dedication to the Romance of Undiné.

Lovely Undiné! never yet,
Since first allured by ancient story,
Your bright, unearthly form I met,
Hath fled the charm its light shed o'er me;
As thus lamenting all your wrongs,
I see you, like some angel mild,
And hear your gently murmured songs,
Half-wilful, yet half-timid child!—
Till my guitar hath caught the tone,
And made thy sorrows all its own;
Soon a thousand hearts shall move
Thy woes, immortal as thy love:—
You full many a heart shall win,
Despite your wayward freaks, and send
Away, who once your tale begin,
Right sorry when they find the end—
Nay, they will read it o'er again,
Your graceful image to recall;
So enter, without fear or shame,
The lowly cot, the princely hall.

862240

Greet the true hearts that you find there,
  But chiefly, with a warm salute,
The lovely, gentle German fair,
  Who in your praise will not be mute.—
But should one deign on me to glance,
  Thus speak: 'He is a faithful knight,
  Who seeks to serve you, ladies bright;
Who bears the helmet and the lance,
Guitar and sword, at tourney, feast and dance!'

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

A Fisherman.

His Wife.

Bertalda, their only daughter.

Undiné, their adopted child, the only daughter of a powerful Water Prince in the Mediterranean.

Sir Huldbrand, Lord of Ringstetten, Undiné's husband.

Kühleborn, the uncle of Undiné.

Father Heilman, a Priest.

ERRATA.

Page 11, II., line 4, *for* "and" *read* "we."
,, 12, V., line 8, *for* "And" *read* "In,"
,, 37, XXIII., line 5, *for* "bring" *read* "fall."
,, 91, XI., line 5, *for* "And you" *read* "From you."
,, 94, XIX., line 5, a period at end of line.
,, 177, XV., line 8, a comma at end of line.

INTRODUCTION.

THE beautiful romance of Baron Fouqué, so plainly told in the original language, contains the material for a poem, or at least a poetic-prose narrative after the style of Fénelon's "Télémaque," or a few other tales which occasionally appear from the Italian or French authors, leaving an enduring charm on the heart and memory of the reader. After reading part of an English translation of the above romance, it seemed to us so dull, so inanimate, that we could only compare it to a body without a soul. This consideration and similar ones induced us to embody the narrative in some kind of verse. We selected the colloquial style of the Italian bard, Pulci; more recently used by Byron, as being adapted to the humorous and commonplace portions of a story, no less than to the mysterious, the solemn and the sublime; he quotes in its favour a line from Horace's "Art of Poetry":—

> "With Horace and with Pulci,
> 'Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci.'"

In addition to blending the *useful* with the *agreeable*, the Baron has also a loftier end in view; to bring

in sight the veiled Christian and moral virtues which underlie the surface, and contain a literal sense for the natural mind, but for the spiritual a sense that unveils to the intellect the veracity of the symbolic language used by our Saviour for the regenerate Christian; also a celestial sense, which speaks to the heart and its affections in what the Apostle Paul explains as the Divine love—love of God—and through this the love of the entire human race. For without this our religion is no better than "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."

In like manner John Bunyan concealed as by a veil, in the "letter that killeth," "the Spirit that giveth life," taking, as the basis of his narrative, the Divine truth that this sin-polluted planet is no permanent dwelling-place for man, but rather to be trampled under foot, as he hastens, with a loftier aspiration, to that Eternal Home wherein God first created our spirits an "image and likeness of Himself."

Does not the beautiful heroine of the Baron's inspired imagination as truthfully depict the progress of an animal soul to a spiritual state? Having first, in obedience to the wish of her royal sire (p. 85), surrendered herself to the service of God in Christ, leaving all her perishable wealth, her natural relations, her delusive joys, and the rightful sceptre of a thousand kings, she chooses the only method revealed to her, namely, that redemption through Christ which includes not the man only nor the lonely woman; but the union of both in a holy and

sacred marriage. So she accepts the man whom Providence had placed within her reach. Like all other pilgrims who follow Christ in the regeneration, she had to progress through many temptations, conflicts with her mortal relations, with her own self-hood, still in the mere natural or animal condition, disappointments innumerable, and at last even the loss of her earthly body, by the legal claim of nature. Again, she appears in the knight's vision, bitterly bewailing their separation, though on the verge of heaven; still assaulted by a relic of her former experience in the sphere of nature, she boldly resists her assailant, cheered by the joyful hope that she will ultimately appear as a daughter of God, and also as a true bride, because of the immortality of the *Divine* love.

If John Ruskin, M.A., who has laboured so long and so successfully to inspire the imagination with love to the fine arts, could see much more poetical lucidity in the paintings of Claude and his rival-pupil Turner, than the artists themselves, we suppose, were conscious of, we can scarcely doubt that the reader, provided he be not an agnostic or a self-worshipper, may be strengthened to a livelier faith and a nobler ideal of Christianity by the charming image of the lovely Undiné. Whether the chivalrous Baron were altogether aware of this interior significance we need not take pains to inquire. "Without imagination," we have heard it affirmed, "there can be no culture, no refinement, no genius." We might also add, no enthusiasm, no religion that

is worthy of the name. We may see a picture so correctly drawn and painted, according to scholastic rules, that no fault can be found in it, with still a great want of attractive interest for the beholder. Such a case is reported in the memoir of Sir Joshua Reynolds; who, when examining a certain picture, could find no fault in it, but a want of something for which he could not recollect a name. He said, impatiently snapping his fingers, "But it wants *that!*" We may suppose that the painter had been an industrious, plodding mechanic, but not an inspired artist; for he probably had never read a poem in his life. Examples of this kind may be found in every profession: in law, in medicine, in poetry, in music, in preaching—in every employment requiring skill. Industry, however, is in itself a virtue we should always commend; for some people of genius have sadly marred that gift by indolence, or other and worse vices.

The death of Baron de la Motte Fouqué was quite unexpected, and it was a remarkable coincidence that just before he went out of his house, in good health, on the 21st January, 1843, he wrote thus in his journal:—

"Heil, ich fühl' es, der Herr ist mir nah, doch nah auch der Tod mir;
Doch weil näher der Herr, heil mir der seligen Näh'."*

---

* Welcome! I feel that God is near me, and that death is also near me; but because God is nearer to me, welcome to me is the blessed nearness."

When he returned home in the evening, he was seized with apoplexy on the stairs before he had reached his room. He died early on the 23rd, without having returned to consciousness.

Such was the Baron's *Εὐθανασία*, an easy and desirable exit, peculiar, some suppose, to persons of intellectual minds. The devout tone of the above words is in harmony with the hidden meaning attached by us to the story of Undiné.

W. H.

UNDINÉ:

THE SPIRIT OF THE WATERS.

CANTO I.

How the Knight came to the Fisherman.

I.

A FISHERMAN, some centuries ago,
Mended his nets beside his cottage door;
No other dwelling could the landscape show,
Far as the eye could range the horizon o'er,
Round this lone hut and tranquil lake, whose glow
The image of tall trees and mountains bore:—
A strip of land with velvet turf so green,
It seemed an emerald 'mid the blue lake's sheen.

II.

The lake, with lofty mountains half surrounded,
Alternate with steep cliffs and heather strown,
Its north and west, with darker foliage bounded,
A gloomy wood of ancient growth, whose lone
And awful depths of shade were rarely sounded
By human step—so this peninsular shone
The lovelier, from the sombre gloom around,
In soft embrace of these clear waters bound.

III.

It is a happy calling, to beguile
The dreamy hours by silver-warbling flood;
With mild persuasion of the rod and line
To lure the sportive finny tribe, or brood
O'er the blue depth; but then 'tis not so fine
When you must carry through a haunted wood
Your captured prey in distant town to sell;
For so our fisherman might say full well.

IV.

For nought but dire necessity conveyed
A mortal step through that dread forest's gloom;
So many a strange enchantment had been played
On hapless traveller, who would as soon
Walk twenty miles as trust again its shade;
But then our fisher kept his heart in tune
With heavenly thoughts, while ever on his way
Some holy psalm he sang, a clear melodious lay.

V.

And since his heart was pure, no evil thing
Would dare to cross his path.—When, as was said,
He sat beside his door, a sudden sting
His nerves assailed, of strange unwonted dread;
For in the silent wood he heard the ring
Of horses' hoofs, and rustling 'mid the shade
Of thick-leaved boughs, that every moment grew
Louder upon his ear, and palpable to view.

VI.

He saw, moreover, what before had been
In that dread wood: a white and flickering shape
Of long-haired giant, through the quivering screen
Of forest leaves, that made his heart to quake.
He prayed aloud, and set his brain to glean
Strong Bible texts that Satan's power could shake.
When lo! that nodding shape proved nothing more
Than babbling brook he oft had seen before,

VII.

Bearing its waters to the calm expanse
Of the still lake; but soon another sight,
Less fearful, from that shade he saw advance:
A knight well mounted on a courser white,
That bounded lighter than a fairy dance
O'er the green sward; so, now bewildered quite,
He gazed, for the smooth turf seemed scarce to feel
The impress of that wondrous creature's heel.

VIII.

Yet a real horse it proved; his rider wore
A splendid doublet of the violet's hue,
Inwrought with gold; the chasèd helmet o'er
Waved rainbow plumes of crimson and pale blue,
While the broad girdle, bright with jewels, bore
The small sword hilt, and o'er him lightly flew,
As evening clouds in ruddy sunbeams rolled,
A scarlet cloak in many a varying fold.

IX.

So now convinced, the old man stood beside
His nets, with cap in hand, until the knight
Inquired if he were able to provide
Stranger and steed with shelter for the night?
"My cot much poorer is than well may bide
A guest like you," said he; "but if such plight
You can excuse, I give all I am able,
Also your steed this pasture for a stable."

X.

Well pleased, the knight dismounted from his steed,
And his kind host unloosed the girth and rein,
When, from all trammels of the harness freed,
He still more lightly bounded o'er the plain.
"And here, Sir Knight, your horse may safely feed."
The knight replied: "How long we may remain
With you, I scarce can say, for this deep flood
I dread not more devoutly than the wood."

XI.

"Heed not the wood, but to our cot retire,
And make yourself at home;" so when they came
Within the hut, beside a frugal fire,
Up rose, most courteously, an ancient dame,
As though she thought the stranger might require
A seat; but down she sat upon the same,
On which her spouse, who oft her manners mended,
Besought his lordship not to be offended.

XII.

"Sure," cries the dame, "you must be doting quite,
A noble lord like this our cot to lead in,
And not perceive that as a Christian knight
He can be no such stranger to good breeding,
Thus to unseat whoe'er may claim the right
Of age—but, pray accept," she said, "a seat in
That chair, young man, which, though 'tis somewhat lame
In the fore-leg, your weight may still sustain."

XIII.

The knight sat down with gentlemanly care,
While a new joy, despite this rustic greeting,
Thrilled through him, which to nought he could compare
But some long-looked-for and delicious meeting
Of kindred hearts. All strangers as they were,
They seemed at once related; 'twas so sweet in
A lone and lowly cottage to forget
Those carking cares which the worn heart will fret

XIV.

In strife of arms or the wide world's disorder.—
Sir Hulbrand told them how he left his home,
Ringstetten's Castle, on the Danube's border;
And his dire perils in the forest lone
Those he essayed to speak of in their order;
But oft the host, with deprecating tone,
Would check these details, striving to restore
Some topic more befitting a late hour.

XV.

At length he said: "'Twere better far to quash
Such themes with converse cheery, and talk o'er"—
Here he was interrupted by a splash
Of water on the panes, which twice before
Indeed they heard; but this far louder dash
Exceeded all, and like an April shower
Our knight bedewed; when, as he turned about,
A low and girlish titter from without,

XVI.

Of laughter half suppressed, provoked the ire
Of the old people, so the host cried out:
"Undiné, child, once more I do desire
You will these pranks relinquish; you're about
To drown our guest, and all our patience tire:"—
Begging the knight would pardon this strange rout,
Since much wise care, for years well nigh fifteen,
To tame his daughter's heart had useless been.

XVII.

"And maybe, I may have to beg again
Pardon for many an elfin prank beside
Of our adopted daughter—in the main
She is a lovely and good-hearted child!"—
"Ah, you may say as much," observed the dame;
"But my experience soon would drive you wild,
With capers and mad antics the long day,
While yours is only a short evening's play."

XVIII.

"All have their cares," the old man said; "'tis right
That you should share; but mine are with the lake,
For one might fancy 'twere its chief delight
My dams to burst, and the best meshes break
Of my strong nets; at times, will scarcely bite
Those fish, with all my care, the daintiest bait;
Yet its bright waters still are dear to me,
As is that child to you, with all her tiresome glee."

XIX.

"Undiné, you have sorely grieved us now
By drenching a great lord:"—with that she sprung
Into the room, and her bright merry brow
Fixed on the knight; with look intent she clung
To this new sight, as stares the mountain doe
On early traveller; at length she flung
Aside her radiant hair, and in full view,
Displayed her large and laughing eyes of blue.

XX.

A lovely miniature of woman she,
So fairy-like in every classic feature,
That if a little taller she could be,
And somewhat more majestic, the young creature
Might vie with Venus rising from the sea;
Nor could one charm the Paphian goddess teach her.
So thought the youth, as she before him stood,
And seemed, like her, a daughter of the flood.

XXI.

He used the occasion of her sweet surprise
Those wond'rous charms to scan, with such a zest
As he ne'er felt before; deeming those eyes
Too soon would glance away, her mind oppressed
With childish fear or bashfulness, that tries
Young hearts in presence of a stranger guest;
For surely ne'er before had met her sight
The splendid costume of a courtly knight.

XXII.

'Twas not as he expected; that long look
Concluded, from her reverie awaking,
A little stool to the knight's feet she took,
Playing with his gold chain, as though to make him
Her friend; she prattled like a little brook,
And greatly marvelled where he could betake him
Through all these long, long years, that ne'er before
Their happy cot should find till this delightful hour.

XXIII.

"Whence came you, pray, to find our home so late?"
"Fair child, I have just come," the knight replied,
"From yonder wood." "So then you must relate
All your adventures in that forest wide,"
She said; "it does most travellers belate
With dire enchantments, who, without a guide,
Would track its dread recesses, when alone,
The haunt of genii, evil sprite and gnome."

XXIV.

Here somewhat of a tremor shook our knight,
As he recalled the terrors he had passed ;
And turning to the window panes, his sight
Observed the twilight shades were deepening fast,
And yet could almost fancy, in dim light,
Some spectral shape, of misty vapour cast,
Was grinning through the gloom ; yet he essayed
To tell the story to the curious maid.

XXV.

"No, no! good sir," the old man said, "'tis late
And you are tired ;" but here Undiné rose
From her low stool :—"I say he shall relate
That tale just now." She with such fervour glows,
And with such comic air her tiny feet
Stamped on the floor, as made the knight suppose
She was as charming in her childish ire
As when more graceful play her acts inspire.

XXVI.

But the old fisher took a different view.
"Undiné, you shall cease this tiresome sport,"
He sharply cried ; the while his mistress threw,
In tones no milder, a severe retort,
To which the maid rejoined : "I see that you
But seek a quarrel, my desires to thwart
With disappointment of the promised tale,
Which I will hear ; or else I shall not fail

XXVII.

"To take my leave, and show you I am not
To be enforced:" so seeing they would not give
her
This boon, she straightway bounded from the cot,
Swift as a dart from chaste Diana's quiver,
Or rather, bow; our verses must be brought
Smoothly to rhyme, and warble like a river.
"Good-bye," she said, in bounding through the door,
"For I shall see your smoky hut no more."

CANTO II.

How Undiné came to the Fisherman.

I.

In vain Sir Huldbrand and her sire essayed
To check the maiden in her mad career.
Silent and swift she vanished, as the shade
Of night when early morning doth appear;
No trace of her light form their fears allayed,
Nor voice, nor faintest footfall could they hear.
Amazed, Sir Huldbrand looked (as to inquire
Whether the maid were mortal) on her sire;

II.

Who with chagrin and anger muttered low,
Grinding his 'teeth, so, when his wrath had passed,
"'Tis not her first offence to serve us so,"
He said, "and we hope each fault may be the last;
Now must our eyes their wonted sleep forego,
Our hearts with anxious fears be overcast——"
"Let us not linger here, in useless sorrow,"
Rejoined the knight; "but seek her till the morrow."

III.

"Not so," said he, "would I abuse my guest,
If even I thought he could the child discover,
As thus to send him in a perilous quest
At dreary midnight, the deep forest over;
And my old limbs would make but sorry haste,
To stop the headlong flight of this wild rover."
"Undiné, dear!" both voices cried amain,
And the lone rocks re-echoed the sweet name.

IV.

Then all the terrors of the wood and lake
Crowd on their minds.—Not so the weary dame;
Too wise herself to trouble for the sake
Of one whose frolics she must hourly blame,
She now to rest her languid limbs did take;
So when our friends the cottage roof regain,
The host desired the knight to take her seat,
While he revived the dying embers' heat.

V.

"Now, since Undiné is past our controlling,
One of two ways," said he, "we can pursue;
Either on our rush-mats we may lie rolling,
Till the grim days our anxious toils renew;
But rather all sad thoughts at once withholding
Our peace to break, 'twere wiser, in my view,
With social converse our dull cares to slaughter,
And something better than the lake's blue water."

VI.

To them, now seated o'er a jug of wine,
Which from a dark recess the old man brought,
More swiftly flew the leaden wings of Time.
The knight, much wondering by what art they caught
One who before his eyes still seemed to shine.
Now for her history his kind host besought;
Since none could ere forget who once had seen
That fairy-wonder, the sweet child Undiné.

VII.

At length the fisherman commenced his tale:
"Some fifteen summers have passed o'er our nook,
Since toward the city, with a weary bale
Of our lake's produce, my lone way I took;
No spectral shapes as yet my path assail,
That haunt the forest; no forebodings shook
My heart; but musing sweet the way beguiled,
Of various plans concerning the dear child

VIII.

"Of our old age, which heaven in mercy sent,
A precious boon our lowly cot to cheer.
Much at that time our anxious thoughts were bent
On the best means our little girl to rear—
As whether, for her sake, we should consent
To leave the home that time had made most dear,
And in the crowded city, more at large
Among mankind, bring up our lovely charge.

IX.

"We did not murmur at the will of God,
Although much straitened in our low estate;
But grateful thoughts we cherished, and when trod
My weary steps the forest shadows late,
Where fiends and genii make their dread abode,
Oft in my soul would holiest prayers awake——"
Here, now uncovering his bald head, he stood
Some moments in devoutly musing mood.

X.

And then, his cap replacing, thus spoke on;
"'Twas at yon entrance of the forest side
That grief o'ertook me—there I heard a moan,
And there my wife her streaming tears did hide
In her raised hands—'Alas, alas! she's gone!'—
And more sad words to utter vainly tried.
'Where is she gone?' quoth I, with anguish wild;
'Oh, tell me all!—Is it our only child?'

XI.

"Too well I knew—no other word we spoke,
But hastened to our cot; when looking round
For what I feared to find, my wife first broke
The silence, by narrating how the sound
Of a sweet murmuring brook enticed to walk
She and our babe, till they the margin found
Of the deep lake; and there awhile they stood,
And the child gazed delighted on the flood.

XII.

"Then rose a mermaid, just as o'er the stream,
With joyous prattle, hovered our sweet babe;
She saw her laugh; she saw her blue eyes gleam,
Then sprang she to her arms, and the deep wave
Closed o'er them, and afar went every beam
Of hope away that we could ever save
Our treasure, or e'er find the slightest trace;
Though many a weary hour I sought the place.

XIII.

"And thus our cot was lonelier than if ne'er
A babe had blessed it; unalloyed our grief,
We sat, mute images of dull despair,
Save sobs and sighs that came to our relief.
Then a low knocking at the door, our care
At once was changed to solace—to be brief,
There stood a lovely child, some three years old,
In raiment richly trimmed with lace of gold,

XIV.

"And amber locks all streaming, as though she
Had 'scaped the perilous flood; yet smiled with mirth,
As gleams a rainbow o'er the troubled sea,
When the first sunbeams cheer the saddened earth
After a night of tempest; thus to me
She looked an angel, or a second birth
Of our lost treasure.—Well, we took her in,
And her rich raiment, drenchèd to the skin,

XV.

"Stripped off; then dried her dripping hair, and
brought her
To a warm bed; with cordial wine we plied,
Wishing the same kind care to our lost daughter!
Widely she opened her blue eyes and smiled;
But much we feared some death-chill from the
water,
Would nip this bud of beauty, who beguiled
Our grief with innocent looks that did enchant us,
Though not one word her cherub lips would grant us.

XVI.

"The morrow found her full of life and glee,
And soon our curious questions we resume;
But whether she had risen from the sea,
Or fallen, in a night shower, from the moon,
We ne'er could learn. She prattled wild and free,
Of boats and lakes; so 'tis to this same tune,
E'en now she sings, in a strange, dreamy mood,
Raving of crystal domes and towers beneath the
flood.

XVII.

"Much it concerned our infant of the lake——
Had she been sprinkled by some holy man?
For should grim Death too soon the darling take,
We knew nought else could save her from the ban
Of heaven; and so, much fearing for her sake,
Through many a day our weary converse ran:
Yet too much good is surely not so bad
As none at all, when much is to be had.

XVIII.

"So when we sought her memory of the rite,
No proper answer had she ever stated;
Only, in childish language, she was quite
Assured she for God's glory was created,
And willed that we should do whate'er of right
To His sole praise and honour was related.—
Thus failing the uncertain to recall,
Safer to be twice dipp'd than not baptized at all.

XIX.

"And as she was a gift of heaven, we thought
That Dorothéa would be her fitting name;
To this the priest agreed, whom I besought
With holy water to confirm the same.
But our young charge refused. In vain we sought
With threats and coaxing her strong will to tame;
'Her name,' she said, 'was that her mother gave—
Undiné—ere she lost her in the wave.

XX.

"Something from her wild story we could glean,
How once her mother took her in a boat
On the deep lake, where falling in the stream,
She struggled, but soon found herself afloat,
And wending to the shore, when the bright beam
Of moonlight to our hut the wanderer brought—
Howbeit, the priest declared he ne'er had seen
More heathen title than that name Undine.

XXI.

"The little maiden, with her innocent brow
And earnest childish pleading, still pressed on
Her suit undaunted, that we would allow
Her name to be unchang'd; till one by one
Audience and priest loosing their aim, now show
No cause why they should still refuse to own
The name she wished; so with good grace he said,
'Undiné,' and baptized the wilful maid.

XXII.

"But all the while, with such sweet gentleness
The child appeared; so full of earnest thought,
It seemed the holy things these rites express
Had, with their influence, her wild fancy brought
To this unwonted calm; and would impress——"
But here his listening friend the tale cut short,
By asking if that distant rushing sound
Were tempest, or the lake had burst its bound?

XXIII.

Both influences were acting, and full soon
The lightning flash presented to their sight
A rising flood of waters; while a gloom
Of blackness shrouded the pale orb of night.
The stream had burst its banks and thundered down
The rocks, as smitten with some sudden fright,
While the fierce winds with demon-fury rose,
Howl through the gloom and tear the forest boughs,

XXIV.

And stop this canto and the conversation
Of these two friends; both started at the sound
And sight of terror, while a dire sensation
Shot through the knight, lest his fair friend had found
A watery grave amid this desolation;
So both rushed out and widely sought around,
Calling "Undiné!" loudly, o'er and o'er;
But gained the same reply they heard before.

CANTO III.

How they found that which was lost.

I.

THIS teeming earth, with all her variation
Of beauteous forms, that endlessly combine,
Or differ when discordant their relation;
As storm, and sunshine, and deep sea sublime,
Are but the symbols, in their vast mutation,
Of things that change not with all changing time.
Our very world is shadowy, the ideal
Or mirror of the spiritual and real:

II.

For with the first inbreathing spirit rose
The earth from chaos; else a formless void
All nature were; thus *power* and *form* and *cause*
Are terms to matter ever misemployed.
No *cause* exists in nature; all that shows
Motion or life, reveals in language loud
A world beyond gross sense, in which the power
Of God creates and shapes from hour to hour.

III.

This forming power is truth, and not that stuff
  Mere fact, as some would lead you to suppose;
For many hundred facts are scarce enough
  One truth to drag to the clear light that glows
In the pure mind:—a test of truth less rough
  Than quibbling logic the vain pedant stows
In youthful heads, until the entire nation
Believes in nought but facts of mere sensation.

IV.

Long sought Sir Huldbrand 'mid the dire confusion
  To trace the footsteps of the phantom maid;
He now half deemed the whole some mad delusion
  Of his bewildered senses, and the shade
Of the fiend-haunted wood began to muse on,
  As how some sprite these elfin pranks had played;
But now the fisher's voice appeased his qualms,
Eke the old dame's, who chanted hymns and psalms,

V.

Praying and wondering where the child would roam.
  "Undiné, you can find our cot no more;"
For the peninsula had now become
  An island, and the brook had changed its shore;
Between the forest and the fisher's home
  Its now unfettered waters fiercely roar;
So that there is no way to gain the wood
But wading through the wide impetuous flood.

VI.

"Heaven's mercy on our maiden!" cried the knight,
"If she one step within that fearful wood
Hath ventured;" while before his inward sight
It seemed Undiné wildly weeping stood,
Imploring help in vain, as vain her flight
From spectral horrors; and the angry flood
Rolling with reckless roar o'er tree and stone,
As though all hope of her return were gone.

VII.

Sir Huldbrand scrambled o'er the fallen trees
And rocky fragments strown upon the shore,
But minding first a long pine staff to seize,
Wherewith to ford, or if too deep, swim o'er
The rushing flood—quivering, as with the breeze,
Beheld that tall lank figure, grim and hoar,
The same which oft had met him in the wood,
Shaking his streaming hair athwart the flood.

VIII.

White as sea foam and ghastly as the grave,
Might even a bolder than our knight have frozen
With creeping horror; but, resolved to save
His friend, he shrank not from the path once chosen.
Near the mid stream, just higher than the wave,
Appeared his head, as the long staff he rose on,
Or broken rock beneath, and paused to take
His breath, or soon had swept him to the lake

IX.

The o'er-mastering stream; but ere to reach the shore
He plunged again, a low clear voice he heard,
Low, yet distinct, above the torrent's roar,
And sweeter than the carol of a bird.
The same dear accents, which to hear no more
So much he feared, besought him ere he stirred,
To pause, nor be in such a breathless hurry
To leave his bones for the *old man* to bury.*

X.

But though the voice he heard, he saw no shape:
"Oh! tell me, lady, if you still belong
To earth, or to some spirit of the lake
Have changed your fairy being?" Now with strong
Gripe to his staff he held, resolved to make
One desperate plunge the howling waves among:
"Then since to mortal life you bid adieu,
May I too die, and be a ghost like you?"

XI.

He said: and when just plunging in the deep,
Sudden he halted at a shriller sound
Of the same voice: "Oh, why so madly leap
On death, rash knight? Look round, I pray, look round!"
And turning as the death-black shadows sweep
Beyond the moon, behold a rising ground
Or verdant islet, gemmed with many a flower,
And crested with tall trees that formed a bower.

* The spectre of the wood.

XII.

Joy took the place of pain, for here he saw
The child, in careless glee, reclining low
On the green turf; for truly not a straw
She cared for fiend or genii: there below
The sheltering trees she lay. Awhile with awe
And pleasure gazed the astonished knight, and now
Rushed up the stream the elfish maid to greet,
Who sweetly smiled, half rising from her seat,

XIII.

And threw with childish glee her arms around
Her rescued hero's neck, making him sit
On the low grassy hillock, where they found
A shelter from the storm. "That would befit
Their taste," she said, "much better than the bound
Of that dull cottage she rejoiced to quit,
Whose cross old inmates were a ceaseless bore.
Now tell the tale you promised me before,

XIV.

"Beneath this sheltering tree," she said; so then,
Happier than lovers, for their love as yet
They scarcely knew, with kisses ne'er again
To leave his memory, her embraces met
The knight; but with such warmth as she had been
Of equal rank, or his *predestined* mate;
So was she, for it was not all delusion,
But a bright foretaste of the heart's infusion.

XV.

Here a third partner (though they did not need it)
Approached, their little world of bliss to share ;
For a loud voice, as soon as they could heed it,
Exclaimed : "Sir Knight, you sit contented there,
Caressing my fair child, and little care
For all the kindness which you so much needed
Beneath my sheltering roof—you soon discover
What I may seek in vain the wide world over."

XVI.

'Twas the old fisherman, whose anxious quest
Had brought him to the margin of the stream ;
To whom, across the wave, our knight addressed
A quick reply : "Old father, it has been
But a mere moment since my *own* feet pressed
This happy sod, for such I well may deem
An islet which has saved your loving daughter,
And my own life, from this devouring water."

XVII.

"All very fine," the old man said, "for you ;
For since with toil and watching I am spent,
Pray make all haste your voyage to renew,
And come on shore by the same way you went,
That I our reckless fugitive may view,
Still more than you, on mad adventure bent ;
And being on such kind terms, as you're the older,
The wild young bird may perch upon your shoulder."

XVIII.

"Not quite so fast; I vow he shall not stir
An inch from this sweet island," said the maid:
"To your old dingy cot I much prefer
To make our dwelling in the forest shade,
Where nought to thwart my will could e'er occur;"
She, with resistless sportiveness detained
The knight, to whom with fond embrace she clung,
And with clear voice a warbling carol sung:

"A brook would leave its humble vale,
The wide world to explore,
And wandering to the distant main,
Its weary waters bore.

"But roughly raved the roaring sea,
And lashed its sounding shore:—
Ah, woe betides thee, little rill,
Thou wilt return no more!"

XIX.

Floated her song like music o'er the water
On a still summer's eve, despite the wild
Roar of the rushing torrent; but it caught a
Chord of the old man's heart, so now more mild
His mood became towàrd his reckless daughter;
At length, o'erpowered, he wept, as weeps a child,
That even Sir Huldbrand begged to take her over,
Since her sire's grief so little seemed to move her.

XX.

She opened her large eyes in perfect wonder,
At this most strange proposal from a knight;
Awhile, to muse on this apparent blunder,
She stood in silence, or to gain more light.
At last, with slow clear accent, but much under
Her usual tone, she said 'twould all be right,
Whate'er pleased him; but then he must not fail
To gain the old man's leave to tell his tale.

XXI.

All other things to leave, she could afford . . . .
And somewhat more, she whispered in his ear,
No word of which the historian doth record—
But here the old man could no longer bear
His feelings, and cried out he would accord
Whate'er she wished, if she herself would tear
From that enchanted isle, to cross the flood;
With outstretched arms, in suppliant guise, he stood.

XXII.

The knight took in his arms the wayward girl,
Bearing her safely through the foaming stream,
Where her old sire, o'ercome, as with a whirl
Of joyous feelings, even as she had been
His own dear daughter, kissed her in his turn,
As did the dame, who from afar had seen
Their meeting; nor one censuring word they gave,
But took her, as just rescued from the grave.

XXIII.

Undiné, too, merging her wayward will
In heartfelt glee, with many a fond caress
O'erwhelmed her foster parents, so they still,
As oft before, in her deep tenderness,
O'erlooked those jars and crosses which but ill
They could have borne, if they had loved her less;
Or if that wond'rous gift she ne'er had known,
All hearts to win, nor yet to lose her own.

XXIV.

The mountain peaks were ruddy with the beam
Of morning, and the tempest died away;
While the huge lake the same refulgent sheen
Displayed; whose fiery billows caught the ray
Of the new risen sun; but all serene,
In hushed and glassy stillness soon they lay.
The birds renewed their songs; the pérfum'd breeze
But faintly sighed among the dripping trees.

XXV.

There stood a shady bower behind the cot,
On the north side, between it and the lake;
Under its leaves the good old dame set out,
In rustic plenty, what they well could take,
Their morning meal; and soon Undiné sought,
Of their good humour the best use to make;
She begged the knight would now withhold no more
The promised tale he should have told before.

XXVI.

The good old people, not to thwart again
The child's determined will, now give consent;
Since nought but trouble did they ever gain,
Whene'er they crossed her wayward spirit's bent.
Now at Sir Huldbrand's feet did she regain
Her lowly place; and soon to work she went,
With one resistless smile our knight to win,
And make him his long history begin.

CANTO IV.

How Sir Huldbrand fared in the wood, where divers interesting strangers introduce themselves to his notice.

I.

WHILE humbly following our great author's fame,
We spare ourselves the peril of invention ;
For such aspiring and presumptuous aim
Is far both from our genius and intention :—
For here, with reverence, great Shakespeare's name,
As a high precedent, we beg to mention,
Who oft his fertile thoughts would rather mate
With ancient story than afresh create.

II.

But, to proceed with our good knight's narration:
"Eight days ago," said he, "my lot was cast
In the imperial city, and its station
Lies through the forest, somewhat to the east ;
When hearing, from the buzz of conversation,
Of a high tournament, that was to last
Through six long days, small urging did I need,
To enter in the lists with my good steed.

III.

"The sun was hot, and like a rain of fire
Streamed from the azure sky his melting rays.
Ere long my heated armour 'gan to tire
More than the brisk encounter ; from its blaze
I turned aside, when, handing to the squire
My burning helmet, as I stood to gaze
On the high balconies, there met my sight
A lady fairer than the rest, so bright,

IV.

"With costly jewels and most rich attire,
She looked a queen amid the stately throng
Of high-born dames. Her lineage to inquire
I quickly turned, and was informed by one
That to no lofty birth she could aspire ;—
Albeit to a rich Duke she did belong,
To whom she came, although he had not sought her,
Yet, being childless, took her for his daughter.

V.

"And she was named Bertalda. Here once more
Raising mine eyes the stately maid to view,
It seemed that she with curious mind did pore
On me, gazing as she would look me through
With her dark, piercing eyes. Now, as before
It oft hath happened to our knightly crew,
Some more decisive favour than a glance
Was mine ; that night I joined her in the dance."

VI.

Here the knight started up, as he were stung
On his left finger; for he did not deem
Just then to feel the serpent's deadly tongue,
Nor did he; but his careless words had been
Unwelcome to Undiné, and it hung
Too near her pearly teeth to 'scape the keen
Sense of her wounded feelings; so a shade
O'erspread the merry features of the maid,

VII.

Of deeper gloom that she was wont to wear
Even in her times of sorrow: but it staid
Only a fleeting moment, with the tear
Of sadness, while sweet melancholy made
Her drooping brow still lovelier to appear,
As she looked up in the knight's face, and said
In a low tone: "You may my fault disdain,
But have I not a cause for all this pain?"

VIII.

So then, o'ercome with bashful fear, she hid
Her face with both her hands; the knight went on,
Though much perplexed with thoughts, of which to rid
His boding mind he strove: "It was not long
Before I found the lady, whom I said
Was named Bertalda, a proud heart did own,
And scornful spirit; so in truth the more
I saw, the less she pleased me than before.

IX.

"But since she favoured me above the rest,
I was compell'd to follow in her train
And yielded, though unwisely, tis confessed,
To one whose heart I never wished to gain.
To quit ungenial spirits is the best,
In all such cases; hence soon brought me pain
My reckless conduct; for I said one day,
'Bertalda, give me your small glove, I pray,'

X.

"In a mere frolic; but she did not take
My words in their light meaning; for she said,
With gravest countenance that she could make,
'If you, like a true knight, no danger dread,
Sir Huldbrand, and can value for my sake,
A glove; by one sole path can you be led
To its attainment; it shall be your own,
When you have traversed that dire wood alone,

XI.

"'And brought me truthful tidings of the same
From its obscure and ill-reported shade'—
Now, for a glove, I would not spell my name;
But when the words are spoke, the vow is made,
And a knight's honour must be free from stain.
So, by retracting, I might scarce evade,
What of a noble knight hath ne'er been heard,
To be again reminded of his word."

XII.

"Did you not tell me," said the laughing maid,
"That this Bertalda had some love for you?"
"Why, so it seemed, if I had rightly weighed
Her words and actions." "Then, if it be true,"
Replied Undiné, "all that you just have said,
She must have been a foolish creature to
Drive from her one she thought so brave, so good,
And worse than all, to that ill-omened wood.

XIII.

"Had I been she, methinks the wood had waited,
For many a day, its wonders all unknown;"
"But the next morning I was early seated,"
Sir Huldbrand said, and smiled as he went on
(His gloom by her kind compliment abated)—
"On the same steed that brought me to your home.
It was a lovely morning; at that hour,
Bright shone the sun o'er mountain, tree, and tower,

XIV.

"Gilding the graceful stems of the young trees,
Whose rustling leaves a gentle murmur made,
That breathed a charm of confidence and ease
Through the delighted senses; soon the shade
Of the cool forest, with pine-scented breeze,
Still more delicious than the flowery glade,
My course beguiled; no more I feared to meet
With peril in that beautiful retreat.

XV.

"My steed is of the fleetest that e'er trod
The battle-field, or won at tournament
The admiring cheers; so, gaily as I rode,
Methought how light would be the conflict spent
Over a lady's glove; the debt I owed
Would soon be paid, more lightly than was meant
By some, whose foolish fears had filled with gloom
That cheerful wood, predicting my sad doom.

XVI.

"While thus in tranquil confidence I mused,
The shades grew deeper round me, and the plain
Far in the distance vanished, which confused
My course; but as I halted to regain
The sight of those bright sunbeams that refused
To pierce the thick-leaved boughs, I looked in vain
For light; but o'er me, in the murky air,
There hung a grisly phantom like a bear,

XVII.

"Fast clinging to the boughs; this brought my hand
As fast to the sword-hilt; albeit, the help
Of sword seemed vain, when I more closely scanned
The hideous shape of this infernal whelp,
Which showered the scattered twigs like drifted sand
Around my path. With a man's voice it spoke,
Or rather growled, outlandishly and gruff:
'Right soon, Sir Nosey,* we'll have wood enough

* Herr Naseweis.

XVIII.

"'To roast your carcase, when the sun goes down;'
With that it shrieked, tearing the boughs around
Like a demoniac, and well nigh had thrown
My maddened steed his rider—with a bound,
Far through the rattling branches he had flown,
Ere I, unnerved, my scattered senses found,
To check his fury and draw back the rein,
Or give that fiendish monster its true name."

XIX.

"You must not name it," said the old man, the while
Crossing himself devoutly, so the dame
Seemed with like pious caution to incline
Her head, and without speaking did the same;
Here fair Undiné, with a joyous smile,
Replied: "'Tis yet untold the best part of the game;
'Tis that they *did not* roast you, my sweet friend.
Now, pray go on, I long to hear the end."

XX.

"Vainly I strove my frantic steed to curb,
Lest he should dash me in his reckless flight
Against the massive trunks; each quivering nerve
Convulsed, he seemed to tremble with the fright
Through every limb; but soon, a sudden curve,
Without my aid now took him to the right,
And up a gravelly hill. Large drops, like rain
Or a thick nightdew, trickled from his mane,

XXI.

"Nor yet had checked his speed that steep ascent,
Had he not met a counter-cause of fear
Athwart the road on which his course was bent—
A sight scarce less unwelcome than the bear,
Whose surly greeting from above had lent
Wings to his wonted speed. His mad career
Here stopped a figure tall, with threatening brow,
And streaming hair as white as drifted snow.

XXII.

"So drawing tight the reins, lest they should slip
My hold again, the tall white man before
I closely viewed, and sure, no sick man's sleep
Was more delusive; for it seemed no more
A man, but dreamy torrent, drip, drip, drip,
Slow tumbling o'er the rocks with sullen roar,
That crossed the road and checked my headlong steed."
"Thank you, dear brook, for this your gentle deed,"

XXIII.

Exclaimed Undiné, with much satisfaction;
But the old fisher shook his head, and looked
Vacant and grave, as if in counteraction
Of such unseemly mirth, lest some ill luck
Might fall upon them.—"Scarce my courser's action,"
Sir Huldbrand said, "had stayed this babbling brook,
Before an uglier object met my view—
A wizard dwarf, and most unearthly too.

XXIV.

"I saw him not till he was at my side,
And much too near for ocular deception;
His mouth indeed, or what had rather vied
With slit of letter-box, straight, wide, and stretching
From one ear to the other"—to describe,
No other metaphor in our collection
We find; and therefore beg the reader's grace
For one so modern and quite out of place.

XXV.

"Sometimes he seemed all mouth, and then anon
He seemed all nose, so staring in my face
With hideous smile he bowed and scraped so long
That I grew weary of the man's grimace;
So, in few words, I thanked him and rode on,
Turning my trembling charger from the place,
With the now westering sun resolved to roam
In search of fresh adventure or my home.

XXVI.

"At the same moment sprang the fellow round,
Quick as a thought, and placed himself before
My horse:—'Now clear the way, or at one bound,'
I sharply cried, 'my steed will trample o'er
Your body, just as lightly as this ground.'
'He will, say you?' snarled out the hideous boor,
With a most vacant visage: 'ere you go
Draw out your purse and pay me what you owe

XXVII.

"'For stopping your mad charger; just look down
That deep ravine'—he pointed to a yawning
And fearful chasm on the right—'there thrown,
You and your steed,' said he, 'had been adorning
Those pointed rocks. Now say what he may own
As one who saved you, with a timely warning,
From such a deadly plunge?' With awkward grace
He doffed his cap, and showed his swarthy face

XXVIII.

"Much nearer than I wished, of dingiest hue,
Half brown, half yellow. 'Wherefore do you strain
Those fearful jaws so wide?' said I: and threw
Into his wizard cap a golden coin.
'Take that, you imp, altho' it was not you,
But yonder brook, that did my steed restrain.'
Glad of so cheap a riddance of this bore,
I spurred my horse, hoping to meet no more.

XXIX.

"Soon at a loud and piercing scream behind,
I urged my steed to try his swiftest pace;
Yet in a moment, fleeter than the wind,
Beheld again the monster's hideous face
Close at my side, and every limb he twined,
Even to distortion—holding up the piece
I gave him, bellowing loud, at every leap,
'False coin, you villain, 'tis not worth a chip.'

XXX.

"His long red tongue down-dangling from his jaws,
Had not the creature all brute strength surpassed,
You would have thought each scream had been the cause
Of death, and every leap had been his last.
'What do you mean by all this deafening noise?
Take one more coin, take two, you roaring beast,
Only begone! I would not scream like you
For all the gold of Cathay or Peru.'*

XXXI.

"Then he began his odious courtesy
Of scrapes and bows, and snarling through the nose:
'Young gentleman, your foolish fantasy
Doth much deceive you, if you can suppose
That I want gold; full soon your eyes shall see
Piles of that trash, far greater than ere glows
In all the mines of India.' Then a bright
Vision came o'er me of mine inward sight;

XXXII.

"And lo! what seemed the flowery turf, became
Clearly translucent, like a globe of glass,
Of far extent, yet tinted with the same
Greenness as when I viewed the verdant grass;
While underneath vast crowds of those whose bane
On earth had been the love of gold now pass
Their days, still working in the noisome mine,
There leading, what they love, the lives of swine,

* "Bends to the golden coast of rich Cathay."—MILTON.

XXXIII.

"Who love nought but themselves, and who despise
All but what feeds their vile corporeal life
Of avarice, but who on earth disguise
Spiritual gluttony. In the varied strife,
Pursuing what alone their hearts can prize;
Their every project with that end is rife,
Till their self-love insanity doth make,
To love the infernal for its own vile sake.

XXXIV.

"It was the heaven of those who doat on gold;
For though the goblin bands more numerous seemed
Than drifted leaves in autumn, or the untold
Waves of the vast Atlantic, yet ne'er dreamed
The veriest miser, or in fancy bold
Conceived such piles on piles enormous roll'd
Of precious metal. Yea, the very floor
Glittered with dust of the accursèd ore.

XXXV.

"Incensed with sport or jealous rage, they threw
Coin at each other, or of largest size,
Wedges of gold; and every spirit blew
The glittering dust into his neighbour's eyes,
Whene'er he wished to blind him to the view
Of what these maniac wretches solely prize.—
My elfin compeer, half within the wood,
And half amid the infernal concourse stood,

XXXVI.

" Calling to one of the demoniac crew
To reach him a small handful of their pelf;
This done, the demon held before my view,
With horrid laugh, three times, a Nabob's wealth;
This, raised aloft, with direful scorn he threw,
Ringing and chinking down the abyss beneath.
' Was this your gratitude for so much help ?
Off with your wretched pittance, sordid whelp !'

XXXVII.

" Then to his demon brethren showed the piece
I gave him ; when, all maddened at the sight,
Sardonic laughter and a direful hiss
Rose, as from myriad serpents, till outright
They roared throughout the measureless abyss—
Infernal scorn ! Then, thick as locusts light
On Syrian herbage, up they swarmed to break
The crystal dome, and earth a hell to make.

XXXVIII.

" I with an agony of fear had died,
Far direr than had seized my steed before,
Had I not plunged a spur in either side,
And he, like a fierce eagle, quick swept o'er
Th' enchanted ground. Right well his limbs he plied,
As a cold sweat oozed out from every pore
Of my whole skin ; so that I never knew
How far, while in this state, my courser flew.

XXXIX.

"'Twas long before I dared to halt again ;
But coming to an opening in the trees,
I checked his onward flight, and saw just then
The lowering sun. Here the cool freshening breeze
Revived me, so full soon I hoped to ken
The city; and a pathway much did ease
My mind, concluding this meandering guide
Would lead us safely through the forest wide.

XL.

"But through the foliage, ever and anon,
Of this sweet shady wood, so cool, so jaunty,
Peered an unearthly visage, grim and wan,
As Charon's crew or ghost portrayed by Dante;
Till mad with rage, I dashed my steed among
The quivering leaves."—Dear Muse, I pray you, grant me
A rhyme for this lame stanza—"Well, a shower
Of sparkling foam upon our heads did pour.

XLI.

"For a mere waterfall the face became,
Whene'er I tilted at it with my steed ;
Yet, from the path by which I hoped to gain
The city, far away our course would lead,
And left but one way open, which amain
We followed ; then at last, from terror freed,
The white face glared behind us, nor would dare
To meet us more, the sight we could not bear.

XLII.

"And so our course we steered as best to keep
The dread pale face in the rear, till well nigh spent
With toil and terror, we the border seek
Of this deep forest. Soon, the enlivening scent
Of flowery turf, the smooth and glassy deep
Burst on my sight, with your sweet lowly tent
On the peninsula. We saw no more
The tall white man with aspect pale and hoar."

XLIII.

"And heaven be praised you did not bring him here,"
Said the old fisher. "Now your tale is done,
Methinks 'twere wise to plan how you may steer
Your homeward track, for sure your friends must mourn."
On which, so slyly, that you scarce could hear,
Undiné tittered to herself; but soon,
Sir Huldbrand said: "I thought my tarriance here
Had given you joy; then why do you appear

XLIV.

"Thus pleased, when we are planning my departure?"
"Because you plan in vain," the maiden said.
"Pray try to cross the stream with that fine creature,
Your horse, or try a boat; if you succeed,
My name is not Undíne. Than such a venture,
I had much rather you would take good heed;
For soon the floating trunks and pointed stones
Would in a thousand fragments break your bones.

XLV.

"For even my father, from that swollen lake,
In his small wherry, dares not venture out
Six yards to gain a kingdom; for the sake
Of your dismissal, 'twould be madness quite."
Said Huldbrand: "Let us rise, and should we make
The case appear as your strange thoughts indite,
Why then, my fate is fixed that I need not
Ere seek a happier home than your sweet cot."

XLVI.

So all set out the country to explore,
Save the old dame; and very soon they found
That even Undiné might have pictured more
Opposing perils, and still kept the ground
Of truth. So whispered Huldbrand in her ear,
"Now are you sorry that my flight is bound?"
"'Tis well," said she, "my timely bite prevented
All the fine things you of Bertalda hinted."

CANTO V.

How the knight fared on the peninsula.

I.

THERE is a bliss which dazzles to deceive,
Haply, dear reader, not to you unknown :
The desolate heart, too ready to believe
Its vanished joys are not for ever flown,
Nor deem them so ; though you no more receive,
Than broken harp its long departed tone,
The charms that now seem lost—or but remain
A blight on all you seek, on all you hope to gain ;

II.

But cherish yet their memory, if it be
Unstained with ought your conscience would forget.
A few short moments from those clouds may free
In which your sun of hope too darkly set;
That sun may rise where you no more can see
Deceit or sorrow. When the dews may wet
More brightly the fresh flowers upon your tomb,
Than if your death had been a monarch's doom.

III.

The heart's desires were ever deemed divine,
Whate'er excite them, odours, flowers, or gems,
Perceived as symbols of that bliss sublime
Which the prophetic spirit oft foretells.
'Twas Schiller's maxim never to decline
From the high dreams of youth; for what remains,
Worldly ambition, honour, gold, or fame,
Are but the spirit's bond, colder than iron chain.

IV.

Recall now, if you can, young love's first dream,
While yet the phantom hovered in your sight,
When thoughts long buried in the hazy gleam
Of early childhood rose again all bright
With innocence and beauty; as would seem
This second spring of joy, with clearer light,
And holier warmth, your riper years to bless
Than its mysterious dawn in childish tenderness.

V.

Then may you feel the bliss that warmed the heart
Of our young knight, and wiled his hours away;
How with what joy, thus severed from all part
In the world's strife, he witnessed, day by day,
The increasing flood, unwilling to depart,
Enlarge its banks and still prolong his stay;
So far from the great world their dwelling tear,
From all its hateful pride, its rivalry and care.

VI.

A broken cross-bow, from a dusty corner,
He soon repaired, and many a happy hour
He wandered with it on the lake's lone border;
And many a feathered life that ne'er before,
Had seen these savage proofs of man's disorder,
Cut short, bore witness to his deadly power;
So, what to some would seem but right and fit,
Its idle pleasures paid for on the spit.

VII.

But when Undiné saw the vanquished game,
With drooping wing, supine before her lie,
With sharp rebukes the cruel knight would blame;
She had much rather see them soar on high,
Their fleeting lives all free from care and pain,
Full-blest in the blue water or the sky:
And o'er her much-loved friends, alas, in vain!
Her heartfelt tears would fall like April rain:

VIII.

But just as transient and as quickly dried,
In pleasant sunshine of her wonted mirth;
For did her friend return, his patience tried
With ill success, she deemed him little worth;
Nor credit gave she, for being on the side
Of virtue; but deplored their larder's dearth.
"Oh, aimless sportsman, have you nothing found?
You make us keep our Lent the whole year round."

IX.

But whether words of love or reckless banter
Between them passed, 'twas plainly to be seen,
That never trivial word or act did want a
Loophole through which the unerring archer keen,
Who joys on the most hostile ground to plant a
Masked battery, might shoot in brilliant stream
Those unsuspected darts, that seem to borrow
Power from celestial bliss and earthly sorrow.

X.

Sorrow came not as yet, nor envious blight,
Their half-unconscious sympathy to slay,
Which grew like tenderest flush of orient light
In the grey dawn; but then the martial neigh
Of the proud steed saluted our good knight;
The sword, the escutcheon's chivalrous display—
Heraldic tracery of a glorious name—
Recalled to nobler deeds of high ancestral fame.

XI.

The recent tournament would also balk
His softer feelings, for 'tis hard to smother
(When silvery trumpets to the spirit talk
Of deathless fame; and bright-eyed ladies hover
On high, while proudly blazoned standards stalk
The field) all longings your own name to cover
With glory; that all time its years may number,
Turning death's doom into a laurel'd slumber.

XII.

"But then," thought he, "Undiné is no daughter
Of a mere fisherman; I could as soon
Believe her some pure spirit of the water;
For all the pearly lustre of the moon
Gleams through her inmost being, as it caught a
Ray of the prestige—that peculiar boon
Through sires of princely or patrician race;
And then that small, fine hand, still nobler than
her face.

XIII.

"Because you can't mistake the hand; in truth,
You may find something in a low-born face
That puts high breeding to severest proof,
As in Bertalda; but the delicate grace
Persistent, that outlives the bloom of youth,
Born of the spirit—'tis a puzzling case.
I wish the child could be a little serious,
Less fond of play, and not quite so mysterious."

XIV.

The knight and fisherman would oft discuss
Their evening questions o'er a flask of wine;
'Tis an old custom which came down to us
From Persia's kings, who deemed it the sublime
Of wisdom, and by no means frivolous,
To make coy reason with volition chime:
That is, discuss them once when staid and sober,
And once, as sailors say, "when half seas over."

XV.

So, then, adopt the so-called "golden mean;"
But our good friends' discourse began to weary
For that, not only the convivial stream
Was at low water-mark, but even the dreary
Hope of supply seemed but an idle dream,
Penned, as they were, like chickens in a coop;
So they would pause, look grave, and sometimes sleep,
Or listen to the shrill wind's boisterous sweep.

XVI.

Meanwhile Undiné, who had no belief
In aught but merriment and endless sport,
From gibe and banter left them small relief,
Whose faces lengthened as their wine fell short;
Yet with a dash of mystery beneath
Her playful mien, at last she sallied forth;
"Tired," as she said, "and longing to escape
From looks whose very dulness made her gape."

XVII.

With twilight came a wild and fitful sweep
Of stormy winds with billows' stifled roar,
Rousing our friends, half musing, half asleep:
The portent of old troubles heretofore,
Which made our knight such anxious vigils keep,
Now brought them quickly to the cottage door;
Which they no sooner opened, than was seen
The maid, who clapped her hands, with joyful mien.

XVIII.

"What will you give," said she, "that I may crown
That jug, now lean and hollow as your faces,
With a fresh flood of rosy wine, your own,
Which soon shall drive away all gloomy traces?
Or rather, for the sake of peace alone,
Your bumpers shall be filled, all such grimaces
Of your ill-humour far away to send,
And shorten days that seem to know no end.

XIX.

"So come with me, for the wild stream on shore
A cask hath thrown from some ill-fated wreck;
A wine-cask too, or I, like you, will snore
For seven long days in melancholy sleep."
This seemed their former spirits to restore,
And so she led them to the margin steep,
Where drifted, in a bushy cove they found
An oaken cask, well ribbed and iron-bound,

XX.

Betokening contents of no low degree;
But homeward as their prize they rolled along,
The crested billows of that inland sea
Seemed dancing to the shrill winds' wilder song;
And sweeping rain pursued them angrily,
Yet drenched them not, as fearing further wrong.
Moreover, our young Sibyl, like a queen,
Waved back the angry cloud with mock imperial mien.

XXI.

Sharply the old man blamed this impious sally,
But mischief-loving laughter for his pain
Received from fair Undiné. Again they rally
Their utmost strength to roll the prize amain
Within the hut; much wondering that should tarry
For them the threatening wind and streaming rain,
Which now, with reckless fury, swept the lake,
Made the old forest roar and even the island quake.

XXII.

They filled some bottles from the generous barrel,
And soon pronounced the quality most fine;
With such no epicure or knight could quarrel
Through all the lordly castles of the Rhine:
So, neither for fierce winds nor waters caring,
They triply crowned their cups with sparkling wine,
Drowning both present care and past vexation
In merry song or jest, a sweet libation.

XXIII.

But suddenly the fisherman, with grave
And earnest countenance, exclaimed, "Good heaven!
How we carouse!—while sunk beneath the wave,
The luckless owner his dear life hath given
For our ungodly glee." "Then you may save,"
Observed Undiné, "all your well-meant leaven
Of useless grief; for if his life be flown,
He neither needs your wine nor idle moan."

XXIV.

"By my unsullied honour," said the knight,
The while Undiné poured the ruby tide
In his last goblet, "I, in fear's despite,
Would seek the owner through the forest wide;
If life were in him, even this very night
Would amply pay for all our jovial pride.
Howbeit, be sure, old father, soon or late,
Himself or heir I'll amply compensate."

XXV.

This soothed the conscience of the good old man,
Who quaffed his wine with countenance serener,
While undertoned a parley here began
Between the gallant knight and fair Undiné,
Touching the restitution:—"Which you can
Some future day make up; you could not mean a
Thing so absurd," she said, "this night to seek
What you might hunt in vain for many a week.

XXVI.

"My very eyes in tears would melt away,
If I should lose you in that fearful wood;
Were it not better far with me to stay,
And that large cask which did you so much good?"
"Most truly," said the knight, the while did play
A smile on his flushed cheek; "nor field, nor flood
Shall tempt me more to wander from your side."
"Then you that error own," the maid replied.

XXVII.

"Each one is neighbour to himself, but few
Know how to quit the love of self alone;
Whate'er is bad for all is bad for you."
The beldame shook her head with pious groan.
"Oh, worse than veriest heathen, Turk, or Jew!"
Said the old father, in severest tone;
"May God forgive me, and save you from smart,
You naughty child, for your unfeeling heart!"

XXVIII.

"I did but utter what I have been taught,"
Rejoined the girl, with guileless brow serene,
And circling eyes, whose lambent azure caught
The purest reflex of the heavenly sheen.
"I can but speak and act what I have thought;
Never could I my real convictions screen:
So what avail your words, which do but jar?
They cannot alter things that really are."

XXIX.

"Silence, I say!" responded the old man,
In tone unkind and harsh and somewhat brief,
While she, more timid than a fawn, began
To quake and tremble, like an aspen leaf,
For the fine sense of liberty to ban,
Of all afflictions, was to her the chief:
Aspiring to the heavens, the noble soul
Shrinks from the shadow of undue control.

XXX.

Yet dauntless was she in her proper sphere,
For adverse qualities are oft combined,
Even such as most incongruous appear,
In the strange dual structure of the mind ;
She now, with instinct feminine, drew near
The knight, and on his breast her head reclined :
"Are you, too, angry with me, my sweet friend?"
But he nor dared to blame nor yet commend.

XXXI.

'Twas not his place to interpose ; 'twas true
The old man's roughness did his nerves distress,
And so he gently stroked her locks and drew
The maiden nearer, with a fond caress.
Full well his kinder sympathy she knew ;
But then an awkward stillness did confess
That social mirth had vanished, whose free-will
The lightest breath of tyranny can chill.

CANTO VI.

How the Knight's Marriage was conducted.

I.

OUTSIDE the cottage door a light knock fell
Upon the silence, like a thing of fear;
For sounds unlooked for, as a funeral knell
In desert places strike the listening ear;
Surrounding terrors too, their senses well
Had trained to throb with tremor sharp and clear,
With that dire wood so nigh—tho' well 'twas known
No human step could track their island lone.

II.

The party gazed with awe-struck looks around,
Till a deep groan their life with power restored;
The knight his well-primed valour quickly found,
And started up to seize his glittering sword.
"Alas!" the old man said, "your arm is bound,
If 'tis the thing I fear; so take my word,
Your idle blade put by, and rather pray:
Those weapons are but made for things of clay."

III.

Meanwhile Undiné, menace in her eye,
Devoid of fear, approached and cried: "Beware!
If you begin those elfin tricks to try
On us, you earth-born spirit, I declare
'Twere better for you from our door to fly,
Than Kühleborn should seize you by the hair."
These words she boldly spake, but not a bit
Their fears removed by her unhallowed wit:

IV.

Increased them rather; for an explanation
Was just upon Sir Huldbrand's lips to sue,
When spake the thing without—some perturbation
Thrilled through them, for it said: "A ghost, 'tis true,
Howbeit to earth-born demons no relation,
But in a mortal body much like you;
So if God's fear be in you, I implore
Shelter within your hospitable door."

V.

The door already had she opened wide,
And raised across her brow a lamp on high,
When lo! an aged, reverend priest she spied,
Who, as the beauteous maiden met his eye,
Started with sudden fear, and trembling cried:
"Good spirits, praise the Lord"—for verily
He little dreamed to meet on that dark night,
And that lone hut, as were an angel bright;

VI.

But thought it some enchantment.—"Am I then
So frightful?" said she: while arch laughter played
Like Hebe's or some rainbow-darting gem;
"Do you not see these pious words have laid
No terror on my soul? Like holy men,
I know the Lord to praise: for we are made
To serve Him with free will, not with revulsion
Of craven fear, or bigot's harsh compulsion.—

VII.

"I am no spectre: so step in, I pray,
Most worthy sire, good people you shall meet."
The ghostly man politely bowed his way,
While rain-drops trickled down from head to feet.
Of portly mien he seemed, though old and grey.
They led him to an inner room's retreat,
And while he clad him in his host's attire,
His long black coat they dried before the fire.

VIII.

Sir Huldbrand offered him a garment gay,
Which did not suit his lowly mind at all;
So these with humble thanks aside he lay,
And donned instead an old grey overall
Of his kind host's, who did his guest convey
Back to the fire-lit chamber. From the wall
Where stood her elbow chair, the dame withdrew:
"For you," she said, "are old and ghostly too."

IX.

Undiné, too, before the good man's feet
Now placed her little stool, which heretofore
Beside the knight had been her favourite seat,
Who whispered in her ear, from his large store,
Some railing wit; but she made answer meet,
With graver face than he had seen before:
"We must not treat His priest, who made us all,
With scorn, nor holy things irreverent call."

X.

The good old priest, when food and wine had wrought
His soul's reunion with his wearied frame,
Related how he their good bishop sought,
And far beyond the lake's blue waters came—
For damage great from this dire flood had caught
Their cloister, and full many a cot the same;
In short, he came to ask, right glad to heed,
Their counsel in this case of utmost need.

XI.

Since yestermorn had he been beating round,
With weary steps, the margin of the flood:
On every side the rising waters bound
His further course. While he this evening stood
Disheartened on the shore, two boatmen found
To row him o'er the strait, in willing mood,
For a small bounty, as the flood had made
A fresh expanse of water through the glade.

XII.

"Scarcely our vessel the still lake had touched,
Than this unheard-of storm broke loose, which now
Hath scarce subsided; the idle oars were clutched
From the men's grasp, and carried round the prow.
Far o'er the whirling waves their fragments rushed,
While toward your isle the storm's impetuous flow
Hurried our helpless boat. Your verdant plain
Loomed dimly through white surge and driving rain.

XIII.

"Then a strange rocking motion seized our boat,
A whirling like Charybdis, round and round,
In circling eddies. If it be afloat,
I know not, so my giddy brains were drowned;
Whether the boat rolled o'er, or I fell out,
I did not note: my senses first I found,
After much struggling with these rolling seas,
On your good island, under these tall trees."

XIV.

"An island, in good faith," the old man said,
"Though lately 'twas a part of the main land;
But since the forest stream had left its bed,
We scarce can fix a boundary or strand."
"So much I noticed," said the priest, "when, led
In woeful plight along the shore, I scanned
The far light of your hearth, with tremulous gleam
O'er waters where a foot-path once had been.

XV.

"Nor can I thank too much my heavenly Father,
Who hath not only rescued from the deep,
But with good people cast my lot; the rather,
Because my life may fall on its last sleep,
Ere faces than these four I meet, or farther
Travel this weary world." "I pray you keep
Plain speaking," said the fisher; then, aghast,
The priest demands how long the strife may last

XVI.

Of the mad elements. "Am I not now
In years well stricken? So my life's long tide
May ebb before yon forest stream sink low;
Nay more, 'tis not unlikely that the wide
Tumult of waters may increase and flow
So broad between you and the forest side,
That your small fishing-boat may strive in vain
To reach that distant world beyond the main.

XVII.

"And you, in your old age, forgotten quite——"
This made the old dame shudder and exclaim:
"May God forbid!" The fisher smiled outright:
"My dear old spouse, your anxious fears are vain,
For pray, what other face hath met your sight
Through all these years of trouble than this same
Undiné's and my own, with our good knight,
More recently?—the worthy priest this night

XVIII.

"Has come. All these most noble guests remain
To cheer you in such dreaded isolation;
So that you nothing lose, but largely gain."
"Alas!" she said, "but 'tis like desolation,
The very thought! Altho' unknown, I fain
Would shun to dream of such a separation
From Christian men and every human tie
Of brotherhood, thus severed endlessly."

XIX.

"Then you remain with us," in sweetest tone
Half sang, half whispered cordially the maid,
While o'er her delicate features lightly shone
An opalescent glow, that fitful played,
As nearer to her knight she gently stole.
"Then you remain with us," again she said,
Scarce audibly; yet these few words among
Orchestral music breathed, like a most perfect song.

XX.

The knight scarce heard them, for a reverie
Had seized his outward senses; far and wide,
Now stretched the blue waves of that inland sea,
And dearer far their little island smiled,
While seemed in mist obscure the world to flee,
And fair Undiné, blooming like a bride,
Grew, a celestial rose, upon his sight,
As tropic flowers expand beneath the fervid light.

XXI.

Such unction was there in that holy man,
Whose words unconsciously had seem'd to raise
These feelings in two hearts ; yet now began
The dame with scrutinizing eye to gaze
On fair Undiné, deeming she could scan
Somewhat more kind than proper in her ways
Before the ghostly man ; while in her mien
Something that would be heard as well as seen,

XXII.

Determined our good knight, whom oft before
The dame had troubled with her sharp reproof
Of poor Undiné, though in truth, much more
The child deserved. "Good priest, beneath this roof
Two souls you see that to the very core
Are blending into one ; and as a proof,
We beg, should these good people not deny,
That you in holiest bonds this night our hands will tie."

XXIII.

Sir Huldbrand's words astonished the old pair,
Though there would come, as both had oft expressed,
No other consummation than this fair
And noble offer of their worthy guest.
Undiné blushed, and cast upon the floor
Her bright'ning eyes, and mused : but 'twill be best
To make conjecture that *no floor* was seen—
The drooping lids so veiled the dazzling sheen

XXIV.

Of their bright orbs ; and so, the truth to tell,
Her looks were earnest and her thoughts so deep,
Her mien so grave, so solemn, that full well
The priest perceived her marriage vow to keep
She was prepared ; so, without doubt, he fell
To question the old pair, in language meet,
If they consented, or knew any real
Obstruction to proceedings hymenéal ?

XXV.

But then the knight was rich, well born, and so
The dame into right order sped to bring
Their cot's best room ; nor would the knight forego
His wished-for bliss for want of wedding-ring,
So hammered his gold neck-chain to undo
The needful metal from the glittering string :
Two links might serve to satisfy the claim
Of ancient law, in making one of twain.

XXVI.

This roused Undiné from her pleasing trance
Of meditation, and with gesture mute,
The knight she checked; for with a sudden glance,
Remembrance came : " Not quite so destitute
My parents left me to the sport of chance,"
She said ; " but with wise foresight, what will suit
Our need on this auspicious eve provided "—
So through the open door she swiftly glided.

XXVII.

Returning quick, two costly rings she bore,
Of purest gold, with jewels rare and fine;
The one with spiral wreaths encircled o'er,
As serpent around serpent deftly twine,
Two moon-shaped opals flushed with flame embower,
With tiny rubies circled, like a shrine,
A perfect emerald, whose surpassing sheen,
The very heart could cheer with its enlivening green.

XXVIII.

The other, which she gave her knight, excelled
In the rare splendour that so brightly gleam'd;
By cunning art, in plastic gold were held
Violet amethysts, their soft light screened
In angel-wings. Half tempered, half unveiled,
Reflected keen, transparent rainbows beamed,
From far Golconda's purest watered gem;
Its lustre well might grace a regal diadem.

XXIX.

The fisherman, astonished beyond measure,
And eke the dame, re-entering now the door,
How the mysterious child such gorgeous treasure
Possessed, yet artfully could hide in store,
Despite her guileless soul and love of pleasure,
So that these precious gems should ne'er before
Have met their eyes, await, with eager face,
To hear some explanation of the case.

XXX.

"My parents," said the maiden, "on that eve
I came to you, these precious trinkets sewed
Upon my dress, charging me not to leave
The same exposed ; but carefully bestowed
In secret place, I should again receive,
When better their true value I might know :
So faithfully I hid them, till this hour
Hath proved the wondrous truth of their prophetic
power."

XXXI.

All curious questions soon the priest cut short
By lighting two wax tapers, which to mention
We had forgotten ; for these the good dame sought,
Who long had treasured up with such intention
And foresight of the occasion. They had caught
Some sacred virtue, too, by consecration.—
The holy man then spake, in solemn tone,
The few brief words that joined two hearts in one.

XXXII.

Undiné slightly trembled as she leaned
On her dear knight—so when the priest had ended,
Said he, "From what you told me, I had gleaned
We were the only persons that e'er wended
Their way to this lone isle ; throughout it seemed
To me—I beg you will not be offended—
A stately figure, clothed in mantle white,
Hath through the window watched our marriage rite.

XXXIII.

" Your conduct puzzles me ; but with your leave,
I'll ask him in." " By no means," said the host ;
The old dame, shuddering, would as soon receive,
She said, as that white man, a church-yard ghost ;
But our brave knight, much puzzled to conceive
This marvel, at the window took his post,
Then said, " Good priest, I really nought discern,
But airy shape that doth to vapour turn."

XXXIV.

This vanished while he spake ; for so he tried
To prove the good man had been quite mistaken ;
And all sat down the glowing hearth beside ;
The old dame's nerves, that had been sorely shaken,
Resume their wonted calm ; but our young bride,
Who with these foolish panics ne'er was taken,
Contributed no little to restore
The sweet hilarity that reigned before.

CANTO VII.

What came to pass on the Wedding Evening.

I.

Our child of mystery, in whose altered mien
Sweet maiden gravity and gentleness
Throughout that holy rite had reigned supreme,
Now quickly changed to wildest recklessness;
Showing the wondering priest what she had been,
Perplexing her new lord, the dame no less,
Who could have scolded, with no common relish,
What the too easy knight had vowed to love and cherish.

II.

But now he took upon him to reprove,
With all due caution, this unheard-of freak,
That sore his patience tried, the while his love
Would smooth him down and gently stroke his cheek,
Or some resistless charm that could remove
All wrath would whisper in his ear, with meek,
Submissive aspect; but this truce well o'er,
The next campaign was madder than before.

III.

It seemed she still remained a soulless creature;
At last the worthy priest came to the rescue,
And thus good-naturedly began to teach her:
"Stop, stop, my playful friend," he said, "God bless you;
You seem already to forget the nature
Of your late vow; I fain would not address you
Severely, but you really must control
What else destroys all harmony of soul

IV.

"With your good husband."—She, with laughing face,
Derisively replied: "Your words, good priest,
Are most appropriate and befit your place;
Instructive also, and, to say the least,
Most minds might suit; but my peculiar case,
Is by your sacred lore in no way reached;
For pray, what sort of music is before us,
When I possess no soul to join the chorus?

V.

"Jesting apart, this is my true condition;
A deathless spirit have I ne'er possessed;"
Perplexed the good priest looked with this position,
Yet more with grief than anger, sore distressed:
His face aside he turned; but she, like vision
Of angel sweet, the baffled priest addressed:
"Nay, I beseech you, hear my story through,
Nor thus reject who never injured you:

VI.

" Have patience with me till you know the whole"—
Here faltering, as with sudden fear pervaded,
Such passionate tears she shed, as though the soul
She had denied, her very eyes invaded ;
Yet vainly wept, for round her, there were none
Who half her heartfelt sorrow comprehended ;
So rallying, with great effort, on his face
She fixed an earnest look with heraccustomed grace.

VII.

And when, as o'er her face, a veil she threw
To hide her streaming tears, the holy man
Conjured the evil spirit which had so
Tormented the young bride, with many a ban
Terrific, this fair lady to forego ;—
And then a soothing, sacred psalm he sang ;
While fair Undiné every solemn word
Repeated, and devoutly praised the Lord.

VIII.

" A deathless soul, how beautiful the thought !
And yet how terrible !— Tell me, I pray,
Were it not better never to have sought
This gift divine, my too aspiring clay ?—
When its foreshadow hath such terror wrought
Through all my frame ?— oh, how I rue the day!—
Yet to those mortal joys would not return--
Are spirits then created but to mourn ?"

IX.

Again she paused and wept ; but all drew back,
As from a thing of mystery and fear.
With earnest look, still on the mental rack,
The priest alone she heeds ; with anxious ear
Awaiting the reply she still must lack.—
"Alas," she cried, "this cruel lot to bear ;
And I so happy once, so blithe, so gay,
With merry song and dance through all the livelong
day."

X.

"Sir Bridegroom," said the priest, "I can discover
No evil in this maid, though much that is
Inexplicable ; but let not that remove her
From your sworn love, or jar your wedded bliss ;
But as a prudent and a faithful lover,
Remain ; so shall you find your surest peace."
With that, the priest took leave, while the old dame
And fisher crossed themselves, and did the same.

XI.

The lady, with her bridegroom left alone,
Her face unveiled, and kneeling at his feet,
"Ah me!" she said, with piteous look and tone,
And aspect, through her tears, divinely sweet,
"You will no more regard me as your own ;
Deserted I shall live—no more we meet !
I, who no evil thing have done or thought,
Shall, for my very woes, be left distraught."

XII.

The sad confession which had shocked the knight,
The mystery which his reason sore confounded,
Now, like the lightning flash, had vanished quite,
As his fond arms the lovely maid surrounded,
And raised her from the ground. Again all bright
She shone, like Iris with soft rain beclouded,
Or young Aurora, on some mountain stream
Flinging, with playful laugh, her first enlivening beam.

XIII.

So smiled she through her tears. Grief could not dwell
In those pure elements, her soul's attire,
Yet mortal elements must ever quail
Beneath the ethereal spirit's glance of fire.
No more foreboding thoughts the knight assail,
That fairies with malicious sprites conspire
To rob him of his soul, in guise of bliss
Connubial, with infernal witch's kiss.

XIV.

"Yet tell me, dearest, those strange words you said,
Respecting Kühleborn and spirits of earth,
That filled my mind with awe, an inward dread,
What could their meaning be?" "Mere words of mirth,"
She said, "and childish fictions, which conveyed
No mystery or terror that is worth
A brave knight's thought. Let us forget the past,
I gave the first alarm, and you the last."

XV.

So vanished every trace of fear and gloom,
While playful dalliance wiled the hours away,
Till, for their nuptial torch, the full-orbed moon
Shone through the trellised panes with silvery ray.
So now retiring to their bridal room,
"This ends," she said, "our happy wedding day,
And ends my tale." "I trust," rejoined the knight,
"Our future story may be far more bright."

CANTO VIII.

How they appeared the Day after the Wedding.

I.

WHEN o'er each jarring sense bland sleep hath furled
The oblivious veil, in black-winged dreams we tread
The awful confines of the spirit-world;
Then, through the dull brain filtered, shapes of dread
The soul appal; or cherub forms, impearled
In light, through all its sense keen rapture shed;
Delusive fancies—to the waking life,
Spirit and matter with unceasing strife

II.

Oppose each other. Well, our worthy knight
Had some experience of this well-known thing;
Whether in wakeful thought, or slumber light,
Whate'er his bliss, he still must feel the sting;
Those enemies of peace, by day or night,
Beset our lives. Tho' graceless thus to sing,
In truth, he was uncourteously infested
Whene'er in feverish sleep he would have rested,

III.

By shapes of horror, starting from behind
The guise of lovely, sylph-like maiden form ;
While dragon's scaly folds the half entwined
Of long-haired mermaid, radiant as the morn.
Affrighted he awoke; while calmly shined
The clear, cold moon—his fear-chilled senses warm ;
For fair Undiné softly breathing lay,
A lovelier thing than e'er was formed of clay.

IV.

The full moon on her perfect features played :
Not marble-white, but living warm she glows,
As some lone star, with ruby tint inlaid,
Burns through the sapphire heaven's serene repose ;
Or white camellia, whose most delicate shade,
A blush incarnates, thus she paler shows,
As though some angel-spell dissolved the strife
That parts the earthly from celestial life.

V.

So, stealing a light kiss, and reassured,
The knight again composed himself to sleep;
The same dread phantoms which before obscured
His dreams, seemed still their dragon watch to keep ;
Till now, all hope of quiet rest abjured,
He gave his mind to meditation deep,
On all the strange adventures which had led,
Him thus, by various steps, the maid to wed.

VI.

Deeming he might have wronged her by suspicion,
Such error he recanted ; also prayed
Her pardon ; clearing by a frank confession
His mind, of what perchance, thought he, had laid
So heavy, as to cause this apparition.
She, when the recantation was all said,
Her soft hand tendered ; but gave no reply,
Save from her inmost heart a deep-drawn sigh.

VII.

But the pure innocence that stood revealed
From her clear open brow and eye-glance deep
Assured him that no evil lay concealed,
Or thought of malice in that heart could keep
A moment's place ; so their new bond was sealed
With kisses, such as made the fond heart leap
To the warm lips ; on which our knight full soon
Rejoined his anxious friends in the next room.

VIII.

Now they, well versed in witchcraft, ghastly lore
Of devilry, enchantment, and the like,
Ransacked for precedent their ample store
Of facts authentic, for evidence to strike
Their minds, as to the chance of living o'er
That dreadful season, should the dear maid, unlike
Her seeming self, her elements transform
To dire white man or hideous Kühleborn.

IX.

Sir Huldbrand, therefore, found his friends conversing
With awe-struck face, in anxious undertone,
While the good priest seemed inwardly rehearsing
A prayer that should all evil things send home:
His cheerful mien, their foolish fears dispersing,
As quickly as bright Phœbus quells the storm
Portending cloud, now kindled a bright ray
Of hopeful joy, not soon to pass away.

X.

Then, in facetious words, with cordial greeting,
Their foolish apprehensions soon subside;
Meanwhile Undiné joined the happy meeting,
But ah, so changed, so lovely!—the young bride
Appeared, yet still familiar; that to keep in
Their wonder, they scarce knew; as by their side
A seat she took, so nobly sweet, so rife
With majesty serene, and new exalted life.

XI.

But yet more affable, and lowlier too;
The good priest, deeply moved, now first addressed
The bride, nor wished his labour to undo;
But with uplifted hands devoutly bless'd.
While, on her knees, and in sweet accents low,
Her sorrow, her contrition she expressed
For former faults, and begged his intercession,
And prayers to be withheld from all transgression.

XII.

And then her guardians kind, for all past care,
She sweetly thanked, with many a warm embrace ;—
But here, kind reader, if 'tis not unfair
Just to put in our notion of the case,
We would suggest her lot was better far
Than some whose forms a deathless soul encase,
And yet degrade or quench that noble spirit,
Tied to a sordid clod, with no soul in it.

XIII.

But what the more confirmed her change of heart,
She seemed quite free from Satan's favourite sin,
For in all household duties she took part ;
We wish that Mrs. Ellis* could have seen
The way she would a pudding make, or tart ;
While, all unsoiled, her pure, angelic mien
Seemed rather gathering power from every duty,
Transforming earthly into heavenly beauty.

XIV.

Howbeit, the priest was there, who, tho' unskill'd
In household matters, could full well discern
All moral beauty ; but his sight so filled
This transformation, that he scarce could turn
His eyes away, so wondrously repealed
Her former faults ; as she again were born
To saintly life. At last he turned aside
To speak with Huldbrand, touching his young bride.

* Authoress of "The Women of England," etc., etc.

XV.

He said she was a gem of priceless worth,
And charged the knight to cherish her most dearly ;
That he, although the unworthiest man on earth,
Had Heaven selected, whom he thanked sincerely,
To place in the knight's arms this wondrous birth,
Of unknown parentage ; she now being clearly
His own, with all their duties nobly done,
Would bless them in this life and that to come.

XVI.

Such was his final blessing with its charm ;
But now the evening sun shone pure and bright :
The lady leaning on her bridegroom's arm,
As both admired the rich and mellow light
On the tall trees, the turf of emerald bloom ;
When, as he slowly faded from their sight,
She, as deploring his departing doom
Lapsed silent at the twilight's deepening gloom.

XVII.

So silently they wander, till they gain
The margin of the forest stream, when lo !
The knight beheld, instead of boundless main,
A gentle murmuring river, soft and low,
Deserting its old banks, as ne'er again
Its former swell and wildness it would show,
Which heretofore had threatened a long season
To hold them in their isle, as in a prison.

XVIII.

"To-morrow," said our lady of the lake,
In tremulous tone, with eyes suffused in tears,
"'Twill all be dry; your leave you then may take
And wander where you will!" "Now this appears
A jest most rich, when I, for your dear sake,
Would give my life with all its hopes and fears;
Besides, you know, the laws of church and state,
Would soon restore your captive to his mate."

XIX.

Thus spake her gallant knight, in merry mien;
But she, with pensive smile: "I feel assured
Your words are true; indeed my heart hath been
So much your own, that ne'er could be endured
A blank so terrible to yawn between—
Thus, in *my* love alone, I feel secured.
Now bear me to your islet; we shall see
Whether your faith with mine can quite agree.

XX.

"I easily could ford that shallow stream
Without your aid; but then 'tis so much sweeter
To rest in those dear arms, so should you deem
Fit to reject me, as a fearful creature,
'Twould be some consolation to have been
Blest for a time; at least, so much the richer."
But here our knight the gentle lady bore
To the sweet islet, where they met before.

XXI.

Filled with anxiety and boding fear,
He scarcely knew what answer he should make;
But, placing on the grass his lady dear—
"Not here, I pray; a little further take
Your burden, to yon sheltered inlet there,"
She said, "and listen to what I relate
With earnest heed; your very eyes will seal
My doom, before a word your lips reveal.

XXII.

"Believe me, through this world there is no dearth
Of beings to sage and seer alike unknown;
Each element brings forth its wondrous birth
Of mortal sprites. Bright salamanders roam
Through fiercest flame; while through the solid earth,
Travels the meagre, gaunt, malignant gnome.
The spirits of the air, by day and night,
The woods frequent, unseen by outward sight.

XXIII.

"But the most beautiful and near allied
To man, of the fourth element partake;
On the main sea or margin, at ebb tide,
May oft be seen; o'er mountain stream or lake
They wander, or frequént the sedgy side
Of rivulet, and when they please can make
Their forms perceptible—fair maids are seen,
Wreathing their delicate hair with shells and sea-weeds green.

XXIV.

"Far in the depths, where crystal domes transmit
Sunlight and starlight, branching coral trees
Form forests wide, and wondrous caverns lit
With the cool fires that flame on Indian seas;
Purple and golden fruits, so fair, so sweet,
As in the dragon-guarded Hesperides,*
Perennial bloom. In happiness untold,
Save in that bygone age, so named of gold,

XXV.

"Their nations dwell; a stately, beauteous race,
Like those who walked the earth before the flood
Submerged their bliss to this inferior place,
Which in primeval holiness had stood.
Cities superb, and mighty temples grace
The land, with adamantine strength imbued
By time, that here brings all things to decay,
Adorned with delicate moss and wreath'd with flowerets gay.

XXVI.

"So when some wild sea-maiden, in her play,
Reveals her lovely shape to human eye,
On the smooth lake, or wind-curled ocean spray,
Singing, as to herself, all cheerily,
Her beauty's fame is heard for many a day,
From clime to clime, as if 'twould never die;
So Mermaid, Syren sweet, or fair Undiné,
You hear her styled, by those who ne'er had seen her.

* The golden apples of the Hesperides.
See OVID, *Met.* iv. 637.

XXVII.

"But why this waste of words? Before your eyes
I stand, a true-born lady of the deep!"
Fain would the knight believe 'twas but a guise,
In mad delusion his blind sense to steep,
So well concerted her wild phantasies
Had ever been; yet still there would arise
Instinctive promptings of a deeper view,
That whispered: "Ah, those words may prove too true!"

XXVIII.

He gazed upon the speaker with fixed eye,
And feelings strange of undefined dread;
She with distressful look and indrawn sigh,
At the first glance, his inward feelings read.
"In one respect, at least, we cannot vie
With your superior race," at last she said;
"For we are *wholly mortal*, and at death,
Yield to the elements our vital breath.

XXIX.

"Then water, air, and fire which heretofore
We wielded, in some measure, at our will,
Resume their wonted sway, and scatter o'er
The earth, like desert sand, the forms we fill
With such redundant life and mimic power;
So thus our little circle we fulfil,
Like nightingales, or golden fishes gay,
Or flies, whose term of life is one long summer day."

XXX.

So those who most enjoy this mortal life,
And in the senses all their being merge,
The spirit starve, or quench it in the strife
Which should have nobly led them to the verge
Of immortality ; a being rife
With ardent aspirations, to immerge
From the vile bondage of a sensual sty,
To join the angelic host of souls redeemed on high.

XXXI.

" 'Our intense joys, to end in nothingness,
Come like a wintry blast in summer glee ;'
This thought would oft my royal sire distress,
Whose vast domain is all that terrene sea,
Whose shores, the cradle of the human race,
Glow with the mightiest deeds of history—
So it became at last his life's desire
That I, his only daughter, should aspire,

XXXII.

" Whate'er the cost in present grief and pain,
To that divine endowment, which to free
From peril, the august Redeemer came,
From all the effulgent blaze of Deity ;
So vast its price, and so untold the gain,
That I cared less our crystal halls to flee ;
The rightful sceptre of a thousand kings,
For what are mortal to immortal things ?

XXXIII.

"By one course only could I reach the goal:
This was to join me in the closest tie
Of wedded life with one possessed of soul
Immortal; thus, by secret sympathy,
Our mingled being forming but one whole,
As the blue river meets the surf-crowned sea,
Distinct, and yet commingled, would remain
Joined to eternal life, as with the boundless main.

XXXIV.

"And now, dear Huldbrand, I have gained this boon,
And ne'er shall cease to thank you for the same,
Though it should fill my future life with gloom,
If we no more united can remain.
I pray you, let me hear my sentence soon!
For soonest done inflicts the smallest pain;
Then I will plunge me in these waters blue,
And dream no more of happiness with you.

XXXV.

"My uncle will receive me, who conveyed
My infant footsteps to the friendly door;
A lonely monarch of the forest shade,
Though many a noble river owns his power,
His circuit strange, by woodland path and glade,
Unwearied plies: he gladly will restore
The wanderer to her palace home again—
Alas! with woman's heart, yet doomed to love in vain."

XXXVI.

But here Sir Huldbrand clasped his lady dear,
With many a tender kiss, and fondly swore
That nought on earth or under it should tear
His bride away, now lovelier than before.
Pygmalion's joy could scarce with his compare,
Who, for his sculptured maid, such anguish bore,
That pitying Venus, to assuage his pain,
Poured the warm tide of life through every marble vein.

XXXVII.

So, in the tender confidence of love,
Supported on the arm of her dear knight,
As toward the lowly cot they peaceful move,
She cared no longer to behold the bright
Throne of her sire, but only thus to prove
That love alone can fill the soul with light,
And warm the heart, whatever ills betide,
Making its own sweet home even in the desert wide.

CANTO IX.

How the Knight led away his young Bride.

I.

THE morrow brought our knight a slight alarm,
For when he woke and found himself alone,
He could no more his old suspicion calm,
But deemed the spectre bride left to bemoan
Her loving lord; when, like some healing balm
On his chafed mind, Undiné entered soon,
Taking a tender kiss, while down she sate
On the bedside, her ramble to relate.

II.

"I took an early stroll," she said, "to see
Whether my wily uncle keeps his word.
I found all things as well as well could be;
The swollen stream to its old bed restored,
Now in a dream-like current, tranquilly,
Wanders the forest, like a warbling bird.
The rebel spirits of the air and flood
Are to most loyal order quite subdued."

III.

Sir Huldbrand thought himself not wide awake,
Since nought of this strange uncle could he tell ;
Yet to his spouse would no rude answer make,
Too glad to hear her swan-like accents swell :
Or rather, a more cheery symbol take,
Say, 'twas the chiming of a marriage bell,
And this the cradle of their infant love,
Destined, full soon, its sterner toils to prove.

IV.

For such a trance of joy came o'er his heart—
It seemed a reflex of the waters bright,
While gazing where the silvery ripples part
The forest from their isle of dear delight—
But here Undiné hinted : "Now to start
Their homeward journey would be easy quite."
"But sweeter far," said he, "a few more days
On such surpassing sunsets yet to gaze."

V.

"Just as my lord shall please," she meekly said ;
"But should our aged friends too soon discern
The change which this undying soul hath made,
They would, with tenfold sorrow, inly mourn
What else, but as a tree or flower had laid
So lightly on their hearts, that they would learn
Soon to forget, and find more genial things ;
For love is only deep which from the *spirit* springs."

VI.

"You're right," said Huldbrand, pleased enough
to find
The sober wisdom he so much admired;
Then opening to their aged friends his mind,
He told them their arrangements now required,
Without delay, an hour or so to find
Them homeward bound.—Here the good priest
desired
To join his friends: he gladly would be made
Chaplain, companion, or lady's-maid.

VII.

It seemed th' old pair had some presentiment
Of their adopted child's new moral birth;
For they, with bitter tears and loud lament,
Parted as from the loveliest thing on earth.
Undiné's tears fell silently, but sent
To the touched heart a prestige of her worth,
That long should linger there, and lingering say,
Alas! that heavenly things from earth should fade
away.

VIII.

But lest this painful feeling should exceed,
Sir Huldbrand, with another brief adieu,
Lifted his bride upon the noble steed.
Then they move quickly on, and soon pass through
The channel of the flood, now fairly dried;
When, as the old cot faded from their view,
The lady seemed with deeper pain to feel
Her parting; yet her grief would fain conceal.

IX.

For they had pierced the forest a long way,
Before a word had passed her lips between,
'Mid shades of sombre hue, that well display
The peerless beauty of our ocean queen ;
As well, the snow-white steed in rich array
Caparisoned, the white-robed priest between,
With Huldbrand, harnessed like a noble knight,
In violet, crimson, gold, and cuirass glancing bright.

X.

Such a sweet pensiveness o'erspread them both,
That when Undiné's tender tears were dried,
'Mid many a loving glance, they still seemed loath
To break the silent charm ; but when it died,
Their ears were struck with sounds as from a fourth
Traveller, conversing with the priest aside—
One of his order, wearing as over all,
A long white robe of sacerdotal lawn.

XI.

So long indeed, that every step or two,
He gathered up some fold in abstract mood,
Which over his left arm he deftly threw ;
His face, too, was half shrouded in a hood.
The words our travellers heard were these : "And
you,
Most reverend sir, so long within this wood
As I have dwelt, I surely never heard
That I was hermit styled, in your sense of the word.

XII.

"For, as I said before, I nothing know
Of penance, and indeed do greatly doubt,
If all the sins that my long life can show,
Would pay the holiest monk to whip them out.
You ask me why I love this forest so?
'Tis for its splendid scenery, when throughout
I pierce its wildering leaves and shadows green
So sparsely gilded by heaven's light serene."

XIII.

"You are a man of character unique,"
Rejoined the priest; "I, being of the same school,
Would fain be more acquainted." "I would seek
The same of you," replied the other; "if it be our rule,
To pass from theme to theme. Your name pray speak,"
The stranger said. The priest replied, as cool,
"'Tis Father Heilman, and my cloister this
That of our Lady of the Holy Kiss,

XIV.

Beyond the lake." "Well, well," broke in the stranger,
"My name, without its haft, is Kühleborn;
But being of this great wood so long a ranger,
Though to no empty, tinsel title born,
I might, without undue assumption, change a
Similar claim with you, so without scorn
Be styled, of Kühleborn most noble Lord;
For I can prove the right, upon my word.

XV.

"For instance, I have just a word or two
To say to that fine woman on the horse;"
So round the priest, close to her side he flew,
As he had been a spirit, or something worse.
To most gigantic stature, up he drew
His wondrous frame, until his mouth was close
To the fair lady's ear. She shrank aside
With terror, and uncourteously replied:

XVI.

"Begone, I say! of you I have no need!"
The stranger, laughing, cried, "Then you forget
Your uncle, who so faithfully indeed
You to this land conveyed. Your mind is set
On this grand wedding. Methinks you've quickly laid
Your friends in the background. Your memory whet,
I pray, but for a moment to return
To former days, and 'dear old Kühleborn!'"

XVII.

"Whate'er your services," Undiné said,
"I pray you never to appear again
Near me; for I not only greatly dread
Your presence, but my husband to retain
How can I hope, if such an uncouth breed
Of relatives should cause him to complain
That I had practised some dire incantation
Making him to foul fiends a near relation?"

XVIII.

"You are too saucy quite, my little niece;
Pray, don't you know that I am here as guide?
These madcap gnomes would soon a pretty piece
Of mischief play, were I to leave your side.
So, with our worthy Father, if you please,
I will conduct you through the forest wide.
He is not quite so ready to forget
As *you*; he tells me we before have met,

XIX.

"And that he saw me in the ferry-boat,
From which he fell into the whirling wave.
He's right; for I was that same water-spout
That well-nigh sunk him to a watery grave,
But for a better purpose kept him out,
For your fine wedding, his good life to save,
I buoyed him up and washed him safe on shore—
Yet for all this, you thank me none the more."

XX.

Undiné and the knight could scarcely take
Their eyes from the good priest, who moved along
As in a dream, or only half awake—
Somnambulism, in our modern tongue,
Seems the right word. The knight could scarcely make
Him hear, though shouting like a Chinese gong.
This incident, we hope, will claim attention
To prove clairvoyance is no *new* invention.

XXI.

"Already," said Undiné, "each one sees
Our journey's end;" and showing to Kühleborn
A gleam of sunshine through the opening trees,
"Now, my dear friend, I beg you will return,
And all your anxious fears for us appease:
Believe me, neither genii, fiend, nor gnome,
In all this world, can frighten us like you;
So, with goodwill and thanks, I beg to say adieu!"

XXII.

The other cast upon her a fierce glare,
That like malignant planet made to creep
Her blood, and seemed to wither up her fair
And shrinking frame; so, with a piercing shriek,
Sh' implored her husband's aid in wild despair,
Who, darting round the steed, almost as quick
As lightning to the rescue instant flew,
And his death-dealing blade as quickly drew.

XXIII.

Then, with heroic flourish and quick flash,
Worthy of Austerlitz or Waterloo,
Down came the weapon with tremendous crash,
That nearly clave the stranger's scalp in two;
Or would have done, but for a drowning splash
Of torrent's foam, that nearly drenched them through;
As the sharp falchion glanced upon the rock,
It seemed with mimic laugh his dreamy rage to mock.

XXIV.

"Ah!" said the priest, awakening from his trance,
"I quite expected something of this kind,
When from afar I saw that stream advance,
And ever nearer to our path inclined;
For tumbling down the rocks, its headlong dance
Sounds much like human speech, though ill-defined:
Its figure too, so like a surplice white,
In forest shade, full well may cheat the sight."

XXV.

Howbeit, Sir Huldbrand vowed he heard it say:
"Ah, you brave knight, I quarrel not with you;
But like your spirit—therefore slash away;
Your pretty wife defend while she is new.
I wish this mood may bless you every day,
Nor while you live, may cool this chivalrous cue.
I quarrel not with you, bold knight—so rash;"
Here the voice ended in a bubbling splash.

XXVI.

A few steps further brought them to the edge
Of the dim forest; here the wide campaign,
Level as ocean, stretched beneath the ledge
Of rock, that towering, overlooked the plain:
While the red sun, on the horizon's edge,
Had just sufficient heat their clothes to drain
Of moisture; then before them brightly lay
The imperial city's walls, with domes and turrets gay.

CANTO X.

How affairs went on in the City.

I.

SIR HULDBRAND was a greatly honoured knight
In this fair city; also, we might say,
Beloved; for, in the dance, an adept quite,
And fond of tilt and banquet's rich display,
His manners, ever winning and polite,
Made him a choice companion to the gay;
So his departure caused them no small chat,
Anxiety, foreboding, and all that.

II.

To his dependents he was so endeared,
They would not quit the city till they knew
Some certain tidings of his fate; *they* feared
Nothing but danger, or the forest through
They would have scoured—such risk to them appeared
Fool-hardy, when they took a sober view;
Tho' still their grief oft stifled with the vine,
Or Xenophon's more Gothic "barley-wine."

III.

So every eve they hoped, and every morn
Began to fear; thus talking to each other,
They kept the thing *alive*—as some say, *warm*—
That nought their dear lord's memory might smother;
Until those dreadful floods had so nigh worn
Hope to its thinnest edge, that not another
Chance for his life would justify these brave
Servants to seek in that dire wood his grave.

IV.

Bertalda also openly betrayed
Her grief, and on herself much blame she took,
In such a reckless manner to have laid
That peril on a knight, whose heart would brook
No risk with its bright honour to be weighed;
Meanwhile, her foster-mother and the duke
Arrived, their sorrowing daughter to remove
From the old scenes of her untoward love.

V.

But at the bottom of her heart she cherished
A lingering hope, so her dear friends besought,
Until they really knew her lord had perished,
They would remain. "Now some young knights who sought
Her hand, with favours high should be embellished,"
She said, "when they the noble lord had brought
Safe to her arms;" but then they did not care
For noble partners in a love affair.

VI.

Her precious hand to pledge she could not spare,
For her returning knight might claim that bliss,
To have induced them such bold feat to dare,
For a mere glove, a ribbon, or a kiss,
And sit down quietly with such small share,
For her, perchance, might not have been amiss :
At length her sober reason make it plain,
Such intrigue, even in woman's hand, were vain.

VII.

So when the unlooked-for knight at length appeared,
The very city seemed to dance with joy ;
Though it could not be said Bertalda shared
This feeling ; there was something to alloy
Her pleasure, in the fact that he had dared
To let a lovelier maid his heart decoy.
Therefore her gentle sorrow turned to gall,
And then she mourned for having grieved at all.

VIII.

But being a subtle woman of the world,
She smothered all that pain as a mere bubble,
And wisely, too ; it would have been absurd
To let those people feast upon her trouble,
Who, in Horatian phrase, are rightly termed
"Malignum vulgus," for they always grovel
In envious malice, and their greatest spite
Is shown when others rise above their height.

IX.

She therefore paid that court to fair Undiné,
Which for the gallant knight before was meant;
For all the city deemed this bride had been a
Princess, delivered from the entanglement
Of fiendish wiles; that so the knight had seen a
Great prize, and his high chivalry had lent
To set her free; nor was this tale denied
Either by Huldbrand or his lovely bride.

X.

For all absurd conjectures of this kind,
They met with prudent silence or evasion;
And having brought the priest to the same mind,
He proved a useless tool for the occasion
Of idle gossip, had he been inclined,
Far other duties lent their strong persuasion:
So to his cloistered brethren he returned,
Ere even Bertalda had the story learned.

XI.

Undiné's friendship deepened every hour—
Bertalda's virtues she too highly rated;
So great would seem her sympathetic power,
She had much rather be deceived than hated:
Though innocence had been her bridal dower,
Such guileless spirits are full oft belated,
Their souls to a far higher sphere belong,
And so are weakest where their foes are strong:

XII.

So they should ne'er a wily spirit own,
Altho' such loftiness might pass for pride ;
But here there seemed a true accordant tone
Between the two ; nor could it be denied,
Even by Bertalda, though she did bemoan
The peerless beauty of this rival bride,
That she felt drawn, by strange attraction sweet,
To her whom 'twas so bitter once to meet.

XIII.

Therefore their mutual guardians to defer
The day of separation they persuade ;
Nay, more—an embryo scheme began to stir
Their thoughts, they could not easily evade
When both were of one mind ; so they confer
With their allies, until the plan was laid,
That fair Bertalda, for Undiné's sake,
At the knight's castle her abode should make

XIV.

For a long season. Now it so fell out,
One summer evening, as the married pair
The starlit city took a stroll about,
This very subject came in for its share
Of comment, and Bertalda too, they thought,
Whose dwelling was close to them in the square,
Would gladly join them ; therefore they invite
Their friend, altho' 'twas verging into night.

XV.

But 'twas a night of beauty; the blue sky,
With its large stars, on earth sweet influence played;
A sparkling fountain, whose bright column high
Rose in the centre, mid the tall trees' shade,
With gentle leap impulsive, as 'twould vie
With things of life, a soothing freshness made,
And ringing, merry voices filled the ear,
Of childhood's mirth, and glimmering lights were near,

XVI.

Which spoke of social happiness around.
So with their own contentment, and what came
From others, our three friends already found
Whate'er their previous doubts or fears could claim,
No further obstacle their project bound;
Propitious stars upon their journey flame,
And nought remained but just to fix the day,
When lo! a stranger met them on the way.

XVII.

A tall man, from the middle of the square,
Approached the trio, with a bow polite,
And whispered something in the young bride's ear,
Whereat, tho' somewhat troubled at this slight
Intrusion on their pleasure, yet so near,
She condescended to receive him quite,
And, in a foreign tongue, as seemed to all,
Conversed, some moments, with the stranger tall.

XVIII.

Huldbrand conjectured 'twas the very same
That with his valiant sword he did not slay
In the late quarrel ; therefore was to blame
For such diversion, that he could not pay
The least regard to questionings that came
Eagerly from Bertalda. When away
Undiné turned, clapping her hands with glee,
At which the stranger muttered angrily,

XIX.

And toward the fountain hastily withdrew,
Shaking his head ; as tho' he still complained
Of some affront ; then, fading from their view,
With its descending waters seemed to blend.
Sir Huldbrand, now assured his guess was true,
Would fain have spoken ; but the words detained
His friend, who begged Undiné to explain
Her wondrous parley with this sprite again.

XX.

Undiné answered, laughing in her sleeve :
"Have patience one day more, then you shall know ;
The next will be your name-day, I believe,
When I this wondrous piece of news will show.
Meanwhile, shall be most happy to receive
You and your parents, if you will bestow
This boon—its anniversary to spend,
With all due honour to my dearest friend."

XXI.

"Pray was that Kühleborn?" Sir Huldbrand said,
With inward shudder, as their friend retired.
"It was, my dear; but you have nought to dread,
Nor even myself, at that which hath transpired;
For he, poor simpleton, from his weak head
Distilled a piece of news that greatly cheered
My heart, altho' by no means his intent,
But truth will out, sometimes, when least 'tis meant.

XXII.

'I gladly will inform you, if you wish,
But having first invited to a feast
Our friends, I'd rather this, our choicest dish,
Reserve for that event; at her request,
I promised she should know." This gentle wish,
The knight would not discourage in the least;
At which Undiné's pleasure grew so deep,
That the same night she murmured it in sleep.

CANTO XI.

Bertalda's Name-day.

I.

THE guests were seated in the banquet hall,
And fair Bertalda shone the brightest there;
Her head encircled with a coronal
Of richest gems, that sparkled in her hair.
So like a queen she seemed before them all,
Or goddess of the spring; for bouquets rare,
Of finest flowers, profusely bloomed around:
By her indulgent friends thus richly robed and crowned.

II.

But when the lordly banquet was nigh ended,
By hospitable custom of the land,
With the dessert, the doors were wide extended,
And rich and poor alike, whoe'er might stand
Outside, within the hall their presence blended
With rank and wealth; while, at the lord's command,
Sweetmeats and wine were handed freely round;
So thus no envious jars their festal mirth confound.

III.

With heartfelt joy Undiné sweetly smiled,
Looking as she had something to relate
Most joyous; but she would, like dainty child,
Take care her choicest thing should come in late.
Bertalda and the knight, though half beguiled
By thoughts inquisitive, yet silent sate
And curious glances cast—but 'twas not long
Ere some one begged our bride to give a song.

IV.

This seemed well timed; so, without coy disguise,
As that her voice was tuneless, nerves unstrung,
Which of all singers, Horace terms "the vice
Who once let go, will scream both loud and long,
Nor stop when told."—Undiné, not more nice
Than Jenny Lind, because she felt as strong
In music's wondrous power, her lute desired,
Then thrill'd from her warm soul these words inspired:

The morning breezes, clear and cold,
Sweep o'er the waters blue;
O'er wavy grass, with flowers of gold,
Bedecked with sparkling dew.

Fair as lake lily, gleaming white,
What glimmers there so gay,
As snowy blossoms floating light,
Or wind-tossed ocean spray?

Unconscious babe, in artless play,
Grasping the flowers with tiny hand,
Or snatching at morn's golden ray
Of thy far distant natal land.

Whence hath wafted, fairy thing,
The reckless waves, thy tender life?
Cease, ah! cease that aimless strife,
Nor vainly to those wild flowers cling.
Trimming their graceful figures slight,
With the tints of heaven's own light,
Their celestial odorous breath
Half creates a life in death.—

But they care not, babe, for thee,
Nor can clasp thee tenderly,
From thy mother's bosom torn,
Even in childhood's earliest morn;
While heaven's smile is beaming through
Those large orbs of tender blue—
Snatched away! ah, cruel lot!
Hapless child! who knowest it not.—

A noble duke hath crossed the mead,
Of knowledge high and manners fine,
Near thee he stops his coal-black steed—
A happier life, sweet babe, be thine,
His princely palace to adorn,
The fairest lady of the land.—
But that surpassing bliss forlorn,
Thou leavest on an unknown strand.

V.

Her voice in graceful cadence died away,
When pausing, with a melancholy smile,
As the low lute tones swept that bright array,
With undertone pathetic, and the while
The ducal parents' eyes large tears betray,
Proofs of the beauteous bride's artistic guile.
"Ah," said the duke, "just so that happy day
When first the unconscious babe before me lay.

VI.

"The lovely minstrel hath full well pourtrayed
The touching story of your outcast lot.
Alas! that priceless boon, a parent's aid,
Left on an unknown strand and vainly sought,
We could not give!"—But here Undiné said:
"You now must hear the suffering which it brought
On the poor parents; so these thrilling words
She sweetly sang and swept the tuneful chords:

Lonely, through each empty room,
Roams the mother to and fro,
Seeking alas, what ends in gloom,
To find her house the home of woe.

Lonely house! (ah, words forlorn!)
When cheered it once a lovely child,
Who led the dear one every morn?
Who nightly rocked to slumber mild?

With vernal warmth the buds are swelling,
Returning sunshine warms the shore,
While vain, you roam the dreary dwelling
That brings your loved and lost no more.

With the breeze of evening mild,
Home the father wends his way,
Musing o'er his only child,
Starting tears his grief betray.

Well he knows, in chamber lone,
Deathlike stillness he shall meet,
He shall hear the mother's moan,
But no playful smile shall greet.

VII.

"Oh tell me, in heaven's name," Bertalda cried,
"Where my dear long-lost parents may be found?
For you, most wondrous woman, so allied
To secret knowledge, can this doubt expound,
Or you would not thus sore my heart have tried."
And then she quickly glanced the circle round:
There sat a high-born lady near her sire,
Whom she could for her mother well desire.

VIII.

Undiné had a humbler prize in store;
So, with a gentle movement of the head
And sparkling eyes, she looked toward the door:
Now, "Where are these poor parents?" gaily said.—
In came the fisher with his wife before
The crowd; so, as their modest way they made,
On fair Undiné their first glances rest,
Then on the splendid lady, her proud guest.

IX.

"Ah! you are right—before you—'tis your child!"
Exclaimed Undiné, fluttering with delight;
While they, with sudden transport, seemed half wild,
And rapturously embraced this welcome light
Of their drear age. Bertalda, with no mild
Disgust, did soon the impertinence requite:
"You senseless fool, these claspings ne'er repeat,
For you are not my mother, perjured cheat!"

X.

The dame unlocked her prize, yet inly said:
"I feel she is my child, though much I grieve
To think that gentle breeding should have made,
Instead of gentle manners, to receive
Evil or good, with equal mind and staid—
My child a veriest vixen; to believe
That lowly birth illustrious rank can blight
The foil that makes even virtue still more bright."

XI.

The pious fisher clasped his hands and prayed,
And with good reason, too, this girl might be
No child of his: but fair Undiné laid
Her head on hand, lamenting languidly,
As if her very life had been betrayed
By this untoward shock; yet brave to see,
She strove her wounded feelings to restrain,
Though hers were greater than Bertalda's pain.

XII.

In truth, her disappointment was most keen,
As down she sank from all her heaven of joy;
Her woman's instinct scarce had perfect been,
Not to have known such things will sore annoy
Ambitious minds, who don't like to be seen
As metal pure combined with base alloy;
Because they deem nobility allied
To dress, or something worn on the outside.

XIII.

For mannerism is but an inner dress,
The tailoring of the mind, which can assume
The æsthetics of each virtue that doth bless
Regenerate souls; so shallow minds presume
All men are what they seem, as on they press
Through a vain world, until the "crack of doom"
Rouse their base souls from such delusive dream
And show what all men *are*, not what they *seem*.

XIV.

Undiné knew no guile, and therefore cried,
With much amazement: "Can you have a soul,
Bertalda?" and by such means vainly tried
To soothe her and that angry mood control.
This proved as though with brimstone she had plied
A raging fire; for truly such an owl
The other seemed, her anger fiercer grew,
While the poor parents sobbed and wept anew.

XV.

The guests, meanwhile, upon the point divide,
Arguing the case most warmly pro and con;
The minor part support the truthful bride,
The major, that Bertalda, "skin and bone,"
A true-born lady was, most stoutly cried,
And that her filial instinct too had shown;
She could no more these fishing parents own,
Than lord or lady could a boor or clown.

XVI.

Undiné begged for liberty to speak
In this, her husband's hall; and so she took
Her station at the table's head, with meek
And courteous mien; Bertalda could not brook
This awkward shock, but looked as she would wreak
Full vengeance; for two various feelings shook
Her mind—she felt her self-respect invaded,
And pride rebelled at being thus degraded.

XVII.

"My friends, at this untoward end, I grieve;
For I had hoped from this much wished-for fête,
We all should more or less some joy receive;
But with this hot discussion you belate
All harmony; I never can believe
Your heartless maxims, nor be so elate
With cruel pride, my kindred race to scorn,
For lack of wealth, or being ignobly born."

XVIII.

"For this chagrin, you have yourselves to blame,
Not me; who can most solemnly declare
That my informant is the very same
Who did the babe decoy, and placed her there,
On the green meadow, near the path where came
The duke, well knowing she would promptly share
His kind regard." On this Bertalda cried:
"Enchantress, base and vile, or you have lied!

XIX.

" Your words with falsehood and deceit are blended :
At least, they must be, if indeed you say
That I from these low people am descended.
By you, my noble guardians, I pray
From all such calumny to be defended ;
And from this evil company away
To take me ; from this cruel city too,
Lest further insults should my peace pursue."

XX.

The duke remained unmoved ; for it was not
His way to act in quarrel and vexation.
The duchess, like a prudent lady, sought
The cause to sift of all this perturbation :
" For till 'twas quite cleared up," she said, " that out
No foot should stir." Then, from her distant station,
The fisher's wife walked up, and somewhat low,
Moved to the duchess with a courteous bow,

XXI.

Saying : " Your love of justice, noble dame,
My heart unlocks, and makes me bold to say,
That if a child of mine you prove this same
Ill-mannered lady, I can show the way
Such proof to find : for a blue mark doth claim
Place 'twixt her shoulders ; nought can wash away,
These from her birth—and near the instep too
Of the left foot, one like it, 'neath her shoe ;

XXII.

"If she will but consent to walk with me
Out of the hall." But here Bertalda cried:
"A pretty tale indeed, that I should be
Thus treated by a peasant!" "But," replied
The duchess, with firm accent courteously,
"To *me*, at least, this cannot be denied;
And so, my dear, we will all three retire
To the next room; the truth shall soon transpire."

XXIII.

The door was closed; and on their friends behind,
Suspense, with anxious stillness, seemed to brood.
They soon returned; Bertalda's head declined,
With death-pale cheeks and towering pride subdued.
"Now," said the duchess, "we most surely find
Our hostess right. Let it be understood,
Bertalda is the fisher's child, no doubt;
No more we need—the *truth* hath now come out."

XXIV.

The princely pair retired, leading away
Th'adopted child. The duke a signal gave
To follow, which the parents both obey;
Then, as a calm comes o'er the stormy wave,
The strife, in murmuring whispers, died away,
While fair Undiné's visage, sad and grave,
Hot tears suffuse, as well indeed they may;
She sinks in Huldbrand's arms, half-fainting with dismay.

CANTO XII.

How they Journeyed from the City.

I.

RINGSTETTEN'S lord had seen, with much regret,
The cross events that marred their festal joy;
Grieved for his disappointed spouse; but yet
His grief was tempered with a bright alloy;
For never, thought he, could his heart forget
Her generous spirit, which could thus employ
Such studious care to please a rival beauty—
Her self-neglect, and noble sense of duty.

II.

"If I a soul have given her," thought he,
"'Tis of a finer texture than my own."
Then soothing her chafed feelings tenderly,
He bade her take fresh heart, in cheerful tone;
For the next morn a pleasant tour should free
Their spirits from those scenes, which must have grown
Distasteful; for the soul will ever fling
Its own complexion o'er each outward thing.

III.

The people formed a judgment on the case
Which, toward Undiné, showed but little change ;
From her distinguished mien and noble face,
Great things they augured ; so for something strange,
Were thus prepared ; but poor Bertalda's place
Sank somewhat lower than it deserved to range ;
As if, when some proud racer should be found,
When second-best, its pedigree unsound.

IV.

So she was censured loudly, haughtily,
With show of reason, being, they thought, low bred,
Because low born ; and nought so pleasantly
Can sooth a vulgar mind, as thus to tread
On prostrate friend or foe ; all deem they see,
From those beneath, their own superior grade :
For " aristocratic *vices* ever exceed
In worth, the purest virtues which proceed

V.

" From vulgar minds :" it hath been gravely said,
By Lady Esther Stanhope ; which to follow
As truth, we might indeed our bodies spread,
(Counting it no small gain) in mire to wallow,
If lordly shoes would deign our backs to tread ;
Yet deem we not this saying quite so hollow,
If only it be perfectly defined
What marks the vulgar from the noble mind.

VI.

For tinsel rank cannot an atom change
Of our life's blood; 'tis only as the spirit
Rules o'er those lower elements, which range
All grades of brutal life, we can inherit
That high nobility that would estrange
Evil in thought or deed; for this can merit
Alone, life above nature, being more allied
To lowliness than empty scornful pride.

VII.

But now 'tis early morn; the rumbling sound,
Of Huldbrand's stately equipage cuts short
Our sermon; for the prancing horses bound
O'er the rough stones; so soon their stamp and snort
Impatient at the palace gate resound,
And to their call our knight and lady brought.
A fish-girl stood before them at the door,
And offered to their view her goodly store,

VIII.

All glittering wet; to whom Sir Huldbrand said,
"We cannot buy your fish, my girl, for we
Are on a journey bound." At which the maid
Covered her face and wept most bitterly.
This conduct strange our tourists' steps delayed,
Which else had glanced away in careless glee;
For soon they found this fish-girl was the same
Bertalda who had tarnished her fair fame.

IX.

So thus delayed, they to an ante-room
With the poor girl retired, to hear her tale,
Which soon informed them of her luckless lot:
How that her guardians would in future fail
To acknowledge or admit her to their cot—
Thus left for cruel mockery to assail;
Disgusted at her violence and pride,
Which would the truth itself in falsehood hide.

X.

Yet they dismissed her with a rich donation,
And on her sire the like bestowed;
Who, with his wife, commenced their emigration
Last eve to the peninsula. "I would
Have gone with them," she said, "but this ovation,
The fisher, who is *called* my sire, withstood."
"Your sire he truly *is*," Undiné said,
Rebuking still the pride of the poor maid;

XI.

"Hear me: the man you thought held keeper's place,
Over the fountain, told your history plain
To me; and, for this reason—that you should not pace
With me to our abode, because he fain
Would have me think that some ill luck would chase
Our course, if all his warnings were not ta'en."
"Well then," Bertalda said, "*my father*, now
It must be so, would not my wish allow.

XII.

"Nor would he take me till my haughty mind,
He said, was changed; for being himself so poor,
Did no fine lady want; but as a kind
Of test, demanded that I should endure
The pain, through that dread wood his home to find,
As a poor fish-girl; thus would they be sure
Of my regard; so being of friends in need,
I to this hard condition must accede.

XIII.

"The wood is terrible! but I conclude—
For 'tis a case of dire necessity;
I am resolved to die in solitude,
The poorest of the poor. Yet just to see
Your ladyship, I called, that my too rude
Behaviour, you would pardon graciously.
I am sure 'twas kindly meant; the fault unknown
Was, that you read my feelings from your own:

XIV.

"So being surprised and wounded suddenly,
Rash words escaped my lips." Her voice just here
Faltered, and she again wept piteously.
Undiné wept with her. "Bertalda dear,"
At length she said, "I beg you not to be
So much discouraged; you shall freely share
Our home, while all our customs shall remain
Just as they were; so pray take heart again!

XV.

"I also beg that you will always speak
To me as we were sisters, thus discard
Titles of rank and honour, which but make
A false distinction, strange to me and hard
To those who truly love for virtue's sake:
For all are equal in that great award
To which our souls aspire; and which e'en *now*
We inherit—all without is empty show.

XVI.

"Our fates are similar, since we have been
Changed for each other, in our infancy;
Let, through this destiny, our love be seen
In closest bond of tenderest amity—
And you shall join our little band between—
But here Bertalda, glancing timidly
At Huldbrand, seemed to ask if he complied
With the kind offer of his lovely bride.

XVII.

He took her by the hand, and gallantly
Begged she would trust herself to his wife's care;
And also said all other things should be
So managed, that her new-found parents dear
Should be informed; lest some perplexity
His firm old friends should grieve;—but seeing here
Bertalda's visage change, he touched no more
The painful theme that made her heart so sore.

XVIII.

Then motioning the ladies both to sit,
He mounted his white steed, so urgently,
They sallied forth, and soon the city quit ;—
Its empty pomp, its lying pageantry,
With all those cross encounters which had hit
So cruelly Bertalda, cheerily
Glide from their thoughts, as glide the rolling wheels
O'er terraced hills and sweetly smiling fields.

XIX.

Ringstetten castle, in a few short days,
The travellers reach ; they stand, at eventide
Upon the fortress-rampart, thence to gaze
On the fair landscape, stretching far and wide,
Of fertile Swabia ; while the ruddy blaze
Of the declining sun, superbly dyed,
Forest and stream, the distant mountain high,
With tints scarce less ethereal than the sky.

XX.

Here a tall person the two ladies met,
Saluting, with a civil recognition.
Bertalda thought she once before had set
Her eyes on this same gentleman or vision ;
Recalling one who in that sparkling jet
Of moonlit water passed with strange transition ;
The more, because Undiné now was seen
To wave the stranger back, with like imperious mien.

XXI.

He, as before, strode hastily away,
Shaking his head; then to the shadowing trees
Of neighbouring grove retired.—"Bertalda, pray
Be not alarmed; but keep your mind at ease,"
Undiné said; "this odious fiend to lay,
I'll undertake; he has no power to seize
Out of his element."—Then a brief relation
She gave of all that wondrous transmutation

XXII.

By which they were exchanged one for the other.
Bertalda, much amazed, could scarce believe
Her friend of mind quite sound; nor to discover
A cause, in sober reason could conceive.
If this be true, thought she, I by some other,
In sleep might be replaced; which would not leave
Power, when I woke, to say why I should vary
From mermaid, monster, or some cursèd fairy.

XXIII.

But then there was consistency with that
Responsive sense of candour which, in sooth,
Truth always gives, and then her present fate
With the remembrance of her earlier youth
So well agreed; while her now stifled hate
Did all obstructive influence from the truth
Remove at once; for credence, we must own,
Is more by feeling gained than thought alone.

XXIV.

Therefore some awe was mingled with her love
For her kind friend; so oft a marvelling glance
She cast at Huldbrand, as he daily strove,
To this most wondrous creature of romance,
With all assiduous tenderness, to prove
His warmest love; as did but more enhance
His joy, to think himself so strangely mated,
As, twere with sprites and mortals both related.

CANTO XIII.

How they passed the time at Castle Ringstetten.

I.

How pleasant are the woes of other men,
When seen through youthful fancy's opera glass ;
When, by the dramatist or poet's pen,
As with magician's wand, before you pass
Martyrs of grief!— In Dante, how we ken
Francesca's deathless love, that could surpass
Infernal flame ; could calmly smile on woe ;
Nor even in penal fire would she that love forego!

II.

O'er mad Orestes' demon-tortured brain
Patient Electra broods, of hope forlorn ;
Or high Antigone's superb disdain
Pours on her tyrant-foe immortal scorn!—
Grief-stricken Hecuba implores, in vain,
For her dear child, a virgin victim borne
Between the pyre and sword ;—Achilles' tomb
Glooms with the memory of her hapless doom. *

* *ὦ φῶς προσειπεῖν γὰρ σὸν ὄνομ' ἐξεστί μοί*
μετεστι δ' οὐδὲν, πλὴν ὅσον χρόνον ξιφους
βαίνω μεταξὺ κα πυρᾶς Αχιλλέως.
EURIP. *Hec.*, *line* 435.

III.

Yet those who thus the dire necessity
Of grief have tasted, rather would forego
The painful theme than, with mere vanity
Artistic, paint their own peculiar woe ;
This feeling in our author we may see,
In that he begs the reader to bestow
Indulgence, if he sketch in fainter tone,
Sorrows that seem too nearly like his own.

IV.

How Huldbrand's kindness gradually declined
From poor Undiné, while Bertalda gained
Hourly upon his heart ;— we cannot find
A bitterer cup by sorrowing mortals drained,
Than love (to many a noble heart assigned)
Repaid with treacherous hate ; in this sustained
Our Saviour, the sublime of misery's bale,
Sharper than thorny crown or ruffian's iron nail.*

V.

Yet tis more blessed to receive than give
This dire offence.—Undiné oft would weep
O'er the sad change ; as oft her tears would leave
Remorse in Huldbrand's heart ; but ne'er could keep
Her former place ; also she did receive
Scorn from her upstart rival with too deep
Submission ; who would still her mistress blame
To Huldbrand, murmuring jealousy and shame,

* Not the treachery of Judas alone, but the antipathy to divine truth in the Jewish nation, etc.

VI.

Whene'er she did not prosper in her case,
On usurpation bent; for tis the way
The vile exalt themselves, by taking place
Of injured merit, and the bad alway
Befriend their kindred breed; although the race
Be all the worse for them; when they decay,
Such creatures gnaw their bones, themselves to save,
Like fell hyænas prowling o'er the grave.

VII.

Yet such was Huldbrand's blindness, that he would
Support Bertalda 'gainst his injured wife;
So she the conflict bore as best she could,
With spirit fainting in the unequal strife,
Cast on its own resources; she had wooed
The very pangs which now assailed her life
Unconsciously; for Huldbrand more admired
This world than that to which her soul aspired;

VIII.

He therefore deemed Bertalda's jovial heart
More genial to his own.—We cannot say
That here Undiné acted quite the part
Of woman; for most ladies would repay
Such rival with some keen, insidious dart
Of venomed hate, in their peculiar way.
Scarce could we blame Undiné if her power
Had hurled Bertalda from the topmost tower

IX.

Of the high castle ; for it had not been
Manly or womanly in either sex
Tamely to suffer a vile go-between
Their sweet, harmonious union to perplex ;
But flesh and spirit evermore are seen
At war, such various laws each other vex ;
So what doth most the natural life annoy,
Spirit may feed on with immortal joy.

X.

Bertalda and the knight were sore assailed
By fearful apparitions, that with awe
The lady sometimes fainted ; and both quailed,
When in lone hall or vaulted corridor
A rustling sound they heard ; this rarely failed
To usher in some spectral shape before
Their eyes ; some tall white man with threatening mien,
And fearful scowl, like what they erst had seen

XI.

As water-gnome or Kühleborn by name.
At last, Bertalda said she scarce could bide
Longer in that dread castle to remain :
Yet still on her pure *innocence* relied ;
For so she called what did her soul sustain,
And then," to the dear knight, she felt so tied."—
We read, the Roman wolf to bite refused,
The bard, while on fair Lalage he mused.*

* Horace expatiates in a beautiful ode on the security which integrity of life and innocence of heart imparts to its

XII.

So with her love and innocence combined,
Making a virtue of necessity,
She bore with fortitude; indeed, to find
Another home that would so well agree
With her insidious arts, howe're inclined,
She was not able.—Here her constancy,
An incident confirmed: a letter come,
Writ by her sire, from her paternal home,

XIII.

In answer to the knight's. It was well nigh
Unreadable; but it informed his friend
Th'old fisher was a widower—peacefully
His ancient spouse had reached her journey's end;
And tho' all lonely as his days must fly,
He much preferred his only child should spend
Her life amid the scenes more genial grown
Than want and solitude could make his own.

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possessor—if we rightly apprehend his meaning, makes it the occasion of a very pretty compliment to his mistress, for, on the principle that beauty is the form of goodness, he seems to assume that the reflection of that quality, while musing on Lalage, was taken or mistaken by the wolf for the genuine article, of which, however, judging from his other poems, the bard himself had not much to spare.

> "Namque me sylvâ lupus in Sabinâ,
> Dum meum canto Lalagen, et ultra
> Terminum curis vagor expeditus,
> Fugit inermem."
>
> *Lib. I., Ode* xxii.

XIV.

He but requested that she would not grieve
His dear Undiné ; nor her wishes thwart ;
For in default, she would no doubt, receive
A father's curse :— Full well the generous heart
Of that dear child, he knew could not conceive
Evil in others.— This message but in part,
Bertalda would receive ; that which her stay
Promoted ; but the rest she flung away.

XV.

Within the castle-court, a fountain clave
A large grey rock, with verdant moss o'ergrown,
Now this Undiné with strict order, grave,
Commanded should be closed ; Huldbrand had gone
But a short time, when this command she gave
To the domestics, that a ponderous stone
Should close its mouth ; with deference they complain,
That this would much increase their toilsome pain

XVI.

In carrying water from a distant place.
To whom Undiné said : " My children dear,
I deeply grieve your labour to increase ;
Believe me when I say, that nought but fear
Of greater evil, should disturb your peace ;
And though my reason may not yet appear,
The case is urgent."—Without more delay,
Their mistress dear they willingly obey.

XVII.

But when they raised on high the ponderous load
Bertalda came, and with imperious tone,
Commanded to desist; for much had owed
That stream, her fair complexion, so no stone
Its course should stay.—But here Undiné showed
Some spirit, saying, it did belong alone
To her as mistress, all commands to give,
And only from her lord would countermand receive

XVIII.

"See," cried Bertalda, "how that fountain clear
Is wreathed in strange contortions, as within
There worked some living spirit that could hear
Your strange command;"—and so in truth 'twas seen
To writhe, and hiss, and strain, as though 'twould tear
The ancient stone, with yawning chasm clean;—
But here Undiné, with more urgent speed,
Commanded the domestics to proceed.

XIX.

They loved their mistress and disliked the other,
Therefore, with double zest, they quick comply;
Down went the stone, as once for all to cover
The rebel element, and also try
Bertalda's power; but she resolved to smother
Her baffled pride, until her friend was nigh,
Sir Huldbrand; for all tyrants are at fault,
When put on their own strength and made to halt.

XX.

Undiné, as a scribe upon his desk,
Leaned o'er the stone, with taper finger, slight,
She traced strange characters of Arabesque
Or Persic form; these letters seemed to bite,
The stone, like etcher's liquid, and so grotesque
Indent their shape; as they were chiselled; quite
Distinct they showed; yet of beholders there
Not one the mystic meaning could declare.

XXI.

Now, as was hinted, fair Bertalda had
Reserved her tears, till the dear knight's return;
So then she met her friend, with visage sad,
And bitter plaint of her hard mistress' scorn.
Huldbrand, with darkened brow, now sternly bade
Undiné, who before him stood forlorn,
To say, why she Bertalda had opposed,
With what strange whim, that useful fountain closed?

XXII.

Undiné said: "You to a slave would show
No wrath until his cause were fairly tried;
So, but the same indulgence pray bestow
On your poor wife; your once beloved bride;
I but beseech your favour to allow
A private interview; when by your side,
I will the whole explain; for I've done nought
Either from mere caprice or want of thought."

XXIII.

The knight was moved ;—the memory of the past,
Gleamed on his spirit through the twilight haze
Of love's decay ; as tones of music cast
O'er the dim soul, "the light of other days :"
Or Exile, whose best hopes had thrown to waste
False hearted friend, or stranger's cruel ways,
Should meet, despite the effacing hand of Time,
One lovely form, the last of "Auld lang syne !"

XXIV.

Features there are that thrill with power, and leap
As music, to the heart's most sacred things ;*
When through the lilied line's celestial sweep
That form you trace to which the spirit clings
With strange affinity ;—a symbol deep,
Of love's freemasonry—The tale now brings
Undiné's vindication and her doom ;—
(The knight had led her to a private room.)

XXV.

"Already, my Belovèd, you have heard
Somewhat of Kühleborn, my Uncle rude,
Terror and anger too, as you averred,
He oft hath caused you in the solitude
Of hall or passage, and Bertalda stirred
With fear almost to swooning ; tis his mood
When angry, those he deems his foes, to grieve,
Or mine ; he hath no spirit to conceive

* "The mind, the music breathing from her face."

"I will not refer to him who hath not music in his soul, but merely request the reader, for ten seconds, to recollect

XXVI.

Evil and good, or balance wrong with right.
Mirror of those vain shadows which we call
The world, of that within, he hath no sight,
That which alone is real; and therefore all
His cheating senses show, he holds as quite
Indisputable.—If in his presence fall
Some idle words or tears, some trivial spite
Of poor Bertalda, he would deem me quite

XXVII.

An outraged victim;—thus in honour bound,
His race to vindicate with dire revenge;
And though I oft his poor, weak brain confound
With sharp rebuke, it can impart no change;
All words of mine are but an empty sound,
To this poor sprite, whose intellectual range
Is close confined in matter, and the strife
Of elements sustains his inmost life.

XXVIII.

Still less can he imagine love to dwell,
As we conceive it, twixt a smile and tear;
Those sweet vicissitudes we know full well,
Can make adversity itself to cheer
The heart, which on the softened spirit tell
With sweet response.—In solitude how drear
Come sorrow, cold neglect, or trouble long,
While two united hearts scarce feel a sense of wrong."

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the features of the woman whom he believes to be the most beautiful; and if then he does not comprehend fully what is expressed feebly in the above line, I shall be sorry for us both."—*Byron's Note on "The Bride of Abydos."*

XXIX.

She gazed on Huldbrand with a magic glance,
That quick recall'd the days of love gone by;
Bathing his spirit in delicious trance
Of former bliss; as saintly ecstacy
The spirit fires, and all its powers advance,
To hold with loftier worlds communion high;
And so in fond embrace, once more they feel
Reunion sweet their troubled spirit heal.

XXX.

"So," she proceeded, "when I could no more
Control our visitor, thus tiresome grown,
I was compelled to close, as with a door,
The watery element, by which alone
He gains access; for these bright waters pour
From the broad Danube, where his sway is known;
And his allies are all its sparkling streams,—
Spirits that in them dwell, like visions in our dreams.

XXXI.

But now that stone and characters unique
Baffle his utmost efforts; though tis true,
If you but choose a single word to speak,
That flag to lift, you can his power renew.
I know full well he longs his rage to wreak
On poor Bertalda, alone 'twas with this view;
You and herself from his revenge to save,
I, to the servants, that strange order gave."

XXXII.

Deeply Sir Huldbrand felt her generous zeal
Who thus, while suffering from her rival's hate,
She still defended with untiring will,
Nor left , the victim of a well-earned fate.
" My dearest wife," he said, " that stone shall still
Remain as you desire it ; then with great
Transport of love, he pressed her to his heart,
Vowing that nought on earth their sweet accord
should part."

XXXIII.

" My dearest husband," here Undiné said,
" While in this mood, I have one boon to ask
Our human hearts full oft are overweighed
With cloud and tempest ; even as those which
mask
The face of nature ; how many many times afraid
You make me, and my trembling nerves o'ertask
Even unto tears, when angry words amain,
Like thunder clouds, flash terror through my brain.

XXXIV.

I beg you will from wrathful words refrain
Whene'er a lake, or pool, or stream we touch ;
For should my water-friends an insight gain
To such proceedings, they would soon with much
Force on our peace encroach ; with might and main,
Would tear me from you ; for their rage is such,
They heed not reason nor relent again,
But would compel me ever to remain

XXXV.

"Within their crystal halls.—Oh Huldbrand dear,
By all the memories of our happy state,
I beg, whate'er your feelings, you will bear
With patience, nor the inexorable hate
Of river-gods provoke."—"No longer fear,"
Said Huldbrand, "my sweet love, that dismal fate
Shall ne'er be yours; dearer you are to me
Than all the wealth of river, lake or sea."

XXXVI.

So lovingly the happy pair return
With confidence restored; but on the way,
Bertalda met them, "the result to learn,"
She said, "of consultation and delay."—
Then to some workmen speaking: "Tis your turn
Of duty now; so take that stone away,
As I commanded"—But her pride had grown
Too high to bear, so now was soon o'er thrown.

XXXVII.

In brief, decisive tones, said Huldbrand: "There
That stone shall lie, as my dear wife hath placed:"
He then reproved Bertalda, who should dare
To show such base self-will and want of grace.
So while the maid turned blue, with blank despair,
A smothered smile played on the workmen's face;
As they well pleased retired and heard the bang
Of proud Bertalda's door; a thundering clang!

XXXVIII.

'Twas the last gun before she struck her flag ;
Her seat was vacant at the supper-table :
But since' twas only natural she should lag
Behind, they waited long as they were able,
Then sent a trusty servant up to beg
Her presence, who to find her being unable,
Quickly returned ; saying, in doleful tone,
" The door was open, but the bird had flown."

XXXIX.

Moreover, he a sealèd billet brought,
Bearing the knight's address :—with sense of blame,
He read it, and these words his feelings wrought
To quick revulsion—" I perceive with shame,
That I am but a fisher's daughter : nought
Shall e'er induce me to forget this name :
But our poor hut my fault shall expiate ;
And so farewell, with your beloved mate."

XL.

Undiné, sorely troubled, earnestly
Entreated Huldbrand to pursue their friend.
Alas ! she had no need, too eagerly,
He sought his reckless sally to amend,
By hurrying to the gate, most urgently
Demanding, who had seen the lady wend
Her flight ?—But no one knew ; then he bestrode
His steed in haste, to take the only road

XLI.

The lady knew ; the one which days byegone
Had brought her ; but there met him at the gate
A page, who said, that he had seen alone,
A lady traversing at rapid rate,
The path to the Black Valley—With a groan,
As turned the knight, impetuous to o'ertake
His friend, was heard the voice of his dear wife :
" Oh, not to the Black Valley, for your life,

XLII.

I beg ! But if you *must* go, take me too."
Huldbrand regarded not, or scarcely heard ;
But dashing through the gate, was out of view,
Ere she could call again ; nor yet demurred
Undiné for a moment to pursue
The knight ; but hastily the groom bestirred
To saddle her white palfrey ; Then alone,
She followed the same route her friends had gone.

CANTO XIV.

How the Knight brought back Bertalda.

I.

A NARROW gorge of stony crags confine
This vale, with rising vapours overcast;
And stunted growths of yew and rugged pine,
Blacken the purple shadows of the waste
And heathy moorland; while the sparkling shine
Of rivulets that wander through the vast
Desert, here deepen to the sombre hue
Of Acheron's stream, instead of cheerful blue.

II.

'Twas twilight when the craggy heights closed in
On each side of the knight. A gathering cloud
Tempestuous hovered, with low muttering din
Of distant thunder; veiling like a shroud
Or pall the o'er-arching sky; when lo! the shine
Of a white robe, through the dark branches show'd
Distinctly, as he thought, the maid's retreat;
'Twas on the mountain side and distant some few feet.

III.

He spurred his horse, which prudently refused
To face an object with suspicion gleaming ;
And intimation gave to be excused,
By rearing furiously aloft, and seeming
Back to recoil ; while foam and moisture oozed
Through all his skin ; so the good knight redeeming
The time, dismounted, and his adverse steed
Tied to an elm, determined to proceed.

IV.

Through matted underwood and splashy brook,
He works his way with caution, round him cling
Dew-spangled branches of the fir, which shook
Their teardrops on his cheek, A startling ring
Of echoing thunder from the mountain broke
With awe upon his ear ; that mystic thing
That lay before him now, he strangely thought,
Might prove some other than the one he sought.

V.

It seemed a female form, 'neath the dim moon,
In white, like garments which Bertalda clad,
Who lay asleep, perhaps, or in a swoon ;
Some time her name he called, but when he had
No answer, the resounding branches soon
Of fir and elm, that made so dense a shade,
He shook, and struck at with his ringing sword ;
But the lost maid returned him not a word.

VI.

But when once more, and in a louder tone,
Her name he uttered, from the rocky steep,
The deadened sound flew back, as hollow moan
Of wintry blast might through the forest sweep.
A nearer view he took; but now'twas grown
Pitch dark, and still she seemed full fast asleep.
Just then a glittering flash of lightning flew
O'er the dread scene and, to his startled view,

VII.

Revealed a hideous visage. In his ear,
Hoarse and mysterious cried; cold horror froze
His blood a stranger's voice: "O shepherd dear,
"Give me a kiss."—As to unearthly foes,
Huldbrand responded with a cry of fear,
And back recoiled. The figure with him rose,
Then, like a thunder bolt, with deafening shout:
"Home! or I have you; for the fiends are out!"

VIII.

Its long white arms stretched forth. "Mad Kühleborn,"
Exclaimed the knight (and like raw soldier smit
With fear, when quivering drum and pealing horn,
And shock of charging host, the panic fit
Drives back), "whoe'er you be, I hold in scorn
Your devilish rage!"—With that, a sturdy hit
He aimed with his good sword; yet seemed to miss.
"There you malicious goblin, take your kiss,"

IX.

He said ; but lo ! instead of blood, like rain,
A blinding shower from mountain torrent fell,
Drenching him through ; so the good knight was fain
To think himself deceived ; but yet too well
He knew the fiend's intention was to gain
This victim from his grasp ; " but who can tell,"
Said he, " the mighty strength of human will,
That power which soon shall either cure or kill."

X.

The utterance of this thought inspired his own
Heart with fresh courage ; but before his steed
He reached, twixt pauses of the thunder's tone,
A sound more hopeful, from suspense had freed
His anxious mind ; for first a stifled moan,
And then a loud lament seemed to proceed
From the acclivity, where now in view
Bertalda's form he saw, and to the rescue flew.

XI.

Finding her clambering the steep rocks to 'scape
The fearful darkness of that gloomy vale,
He stepped before the maid, and kindly spake
In soothing tone, such words as did not fail
Her proud, resentful enterprise to shake ;
Soft speech made all her angry feelings quail ;
For sure 'twas no small gain, by her dear lord,
To be thus kindly sought for and restored.

XII.

So fainting with fatigue, she gladly leant
On the dear knight, who led her to the place
Where he had left the horse, on which he meant
To seat the lady ; but with such ill grace
The steed behaved, that were it his intent,
Himself to mount, 'twould need some skill to face
That snort, that frantic stare, those ears laid down,
Which even a well trained rider might have thrown.

XIII.

So, wearied as she was, they both were fain
To trudge on foot ; she trembling with affright,
And he scarce able, with the lengthened rein,
His restive steed to hold ; for the dark night,
With heaven's artillery and tempestuous rain,
Was terrible ; and yet all this was light,
Compared with what they suffered from the fear
Of spectral horrors and enchantments drear. *

XIV.

At last Bertalda, her tired arm withdrew
From her conductor, sinking on the ground.
" Here let me lie ; to me alone is due
All this great suffering ; here my fault hath found
Its proper punishment ;" she said, and threw
Herself on the wet grass ; but with rebound
Of gallant spirit : " Never," cried the knight,
" Will I desert you, in a shameful flight

* " Of forests and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant than meets the ear."
MILTON, IL PENSEROSO.

XV.

From demons imbecile."—The maddened steed
Plunged wildly, dragging the brave knight away
From poor Bertalda; so his utmost heed
Required, lest he should trample, where she lay,
With murderous hoof; and now in fear she prayed,
He would not leave her there, but kindly stay.—
So 'twixt the two, our knight was much embarrassed,
With spectre, horse and lady jointly harrassed.

XVI.

Just at this crisis of necessity
A rumbling waggon on the stony way
Behind him greatly cheered; so lustily,
He called for present help, without delay.
"Have patience!" was responded cheerfully,
By honest Waggoner, "a moment stay,
And I am with you!" Then two horses white,
Or rather grey, came suddenly in sight;

XVII.

Clearing the bushes, at their driver's call
The steady brutes stood still. He wore a frock
Of linen white, that, with white overall
Spread o'er the waggon to preserve his stock
In some sort did a glimmering light recall;
Then helped the knight his restive steed to stop.
"Ah," said the Waggoner, "full well I know
The cause of his complaint, and soon will show

XVIII.

"The way to cure it; for a water sprite
This valley haunts;—twas once the same with me,
And these good greys, which now, you see, are quite
Subdued and still.—A charm I know to free
Your horse," he said; "so, with your leave, will try it."
"Try," said the knight, "for much I long to see
Your luck;" on which the honest man drew near
And whispered something in the mad steed's ear.

XIX.

The restive horse seemed well to understand
His meaning; the same instant he became
So gentle, that to lead him by the hand
Was easy. Yet asking not the carter to explain,
Our knight did only venture to demand
Straightway a sheltered seat within the wain
For poor Bertalda. So 'twas soon agreed—
An inside place for her, while he should ride the steed.

XX.

Some bags of cotton formed a cushioned seat
For the exhausted lady; but the knight
Now found his horse so wearied, that his feet
Could ill support the body, so 'twas quite
Useless to mount; then following the discreet
Advice of the good carter seem'd but right;
A seat within the waggon he should find,
And trust the docile steed to trot behind,

XXI.

Fixed by the rein, till their short journey's end.
"For tis a downhill road," said he, "and light
For my good greys; so I, on foot, will tend
The team for more security." The knight
Promptly agreed. Then quickly 'gan to mend
The weather; the dun sky grew clear and bright
Till evening came, and then Bertalda gained
Confidence with the knight, and both explain'd

XXII.

Each other's conduct; altho' nought was said
But words of common courtesy, 'twas plain,
As glowworm's lamp that sparkles in the shade
Of evening, that our lady did not feign
Affection cherished for the knight, who weighed
The expressive tones which from the heart had made
Their impress; he replied in trivial way,
That rather love than knowledge should convey.

XXIII.

While this soft interchange their thoughts beguile,
The waggoner exclaimed, with startling shout:
"Pick up your feet, my handsome greys!" the while
He cracked his whip—"and mind what you're about!
Remember who you are; so in good style,
Pull both together." Here the knight looked out;
When lo! a mighty flood was whirling round
The cart, like flashing mill-wheels, while the ground

XXIV.

Sank from beneath, and left the horses swimming.
"Now pray what road is this?" Sir Huldbrand cried,
"That leads into the sea!"—"Oh, you are dreaming!"
With a loud laugh, exclaimed the reckless guide;
"For 'tis, in truth, the river that is streaming
Across the road."—"Pray look on t'other side,
And round about; if you be wide awake,
You'll see some water there and no mistake!"

XXV.

Then rushed the crested billows, like a sea,
On each side, rolling o'er the vale forlorn
With maddened roar. "Oh, help us! for I see,"
Cried out the knight, "that devilish Kühleborn
Hath clutched us now!—Have you no charm to free
From drowning, ere the waggon be o'erborne
By this devouring flood?"—"No charms would tell,"
Said he, "until you first have learned my name to spell."

XXVI.

"Is this a time for riddles," cried the knight,
"When we are drowning? Pray look round and see
The water rising to this fearful height!—
Then what avails your stupid name to me?"
"Just this," said he, and thrust—oh! hideous sight!
A dreadful face distorted frightfully,
With maniac laugh; then, like a dream of night,
Waggon and horses vanished from their sight;

XXVII.

"For I am Kühleborn," exclaimed the guide,
And straightway changed from man to giant surge,
Rising, like liquid tower, above the wide
Foaming white torrent; rising to submerge
The travellers;—but Undiné, at their side,
They hear, as the pale moon pass'd o'er the verge
Of thundercloud; her voice, her shadowy form
Seemed like an angel, ruling o'er the storm;

XXVIII.

Upon a rising ground, she waved her hand,
With threatening mien; on which the mighty wave
With muttered roar vindictive, 'neath the bland
Beam of the moon, sank down; while she to save
Her friends, like a white dove, from that high stand
Descended, and her succouring hand she gave,
Leading them up the dry and flowery ground,
While they, by slow degrees, their scattered senses found.

XXIX.

With no small effort, she dispelled their fear.
So when Bertalda once again her heart
Had found, she urged them, from that valley drear,
To hasten their escape; so to depart
They quick prepare. Bertalda, in the rear,
She placed on her white palfrey; for no cart
Did she desire. Full soon, in wearied state,
They enter the strong castle's welcome gate.

CANTO XV.

The Knight a Widower.

I.

THE adventure, with the peril they sustained,
Seemed, like a messenger of peace, to bring
Enjoyment to their home. Undiné gained
Some transient glimpses, like returning spring,
Of love too long withheld. Her hopes had waned,
But now they brighten, and all freshly fling
The rainbow hues of future joys around
A heart where innocence its home had found.

II.

Bertalda, too, more gentle seemed to grow,
Not seeking for it merit to maintain;
So when Undiné, or the knight, to show
Their rectitude, attempted to explain
Why they the obstructed fountain should allow,
Bertalda begged they would at once refrain.
The fountain even to mention caused her shame,
And the Black Valley she scarce dared to name.

III.

It seemed impossible that aught should jar
Their future peace. So winter came and went,
While still their genial harmony was far
From change ; when the pure white frost blent
With tender green, and the soft vernal air
Brought the glad season, all its freshness sent
Into their minds those purer joys that seem
Reflected truly from the heart's sweet dream.

IV.

The stork and swallow from a happier clime
Returned, with promise of long summer days :
So the three friends, while rambling in the prime
Of morning, to enjoy th' enlivening rays
Of vernal sunbeams, where the sparkling shine
Of tributary streams, meandering maze,
Sought the broad Danube — and could scarce restrain
Their longing for a voyage or tour again.

V.

Huldbrand described Vienna, how she rose
Like river-queen above the glowing tide,
Whose ever-widening wave superbly flows
'Twixt castled rocks and meadows fair and wide.
Bertalda soon with a like fervour glows.
" Oh ! how delightful down that stream to glide,"
She said, " to that fair city !"—yet scarce utter'd
The words, before she looked confused and flutter'd,

VI.

And with a modest blush, the forward speech
Cut short, which fair Undiné quick renewed—
The more, because such diffidence could reach
Her warm approval—and the theme pursued :
"What should prevent their voyage if they each
And all agreed?" They, in a moment, viewed
The thing as done. In fancy's magic eye
Their embryo tour, well pleased, they soon descry.

VII.

Huldbrand agreed with pleasure to the sail,
Save a slight reservation which he hinted
To fair Undiné : lest by stream or dale
Old Kühleborn should meet them, for unstinted
His power at such great distance would prevail.
"Leave that to me, his tricks shall be prevented,"
She laughing said : so without further doubt,
They make due preparation, and set out.

VIII.

Our evil genius that in ambush lies
For our destruction, ever seeks to lull
Its victims with fair hopes and false disguise
Of gilded baits; while scenes of peril full,
That chill our hearts with terror and surprise,
May prove heaven's messengers our souls to pull
From hidden dangers ; or the treacherous hate
Of seeming friend, the direst scourge of fate.

IX.

Their dreams of fancy were indeed excelled
By pleasures deepening every passing hour.
The gliding barque, by scented gales impelled,
The senses lulled with nature's soothing power.
But in a few short days the river swelled
Obstructive, and some adverse winds blew o'er
Their sail, with other indications plain,
That they were on old Kühleborn's domain.

X.

For tho' Undiné oft rebuked the winds
Or swelling waters, till they seemed subdued
Or baffled, yet again the wily fiends
Incessant their malignant tricks renewed
With terrors mingled. Now her deeds, she finds,
The servants and the oarsmen wondering viewed:
They soon began to look upon the three
As being no better than they ought to be.

XI.

So with suspicions vague and troubles real,
Each passing moment saw their peace decline,
As some base enemy, beneath the veil
Of friendship, every hope will undermine,
And poison every bliss, until you feel
That joy no more can on your prospects shine:
So they began their voyage to repent,
For Huldbrand his annoyance would resent

XII.

On fair Undiné. "So it comes to pass,"
Thought he, "when souls ungenial thus are tied
In marriage bonds; much more when to the class
Of mermaid most unnaturally allied.
'Tis my misfortune, not my crime, alas!
For little did I deem, when by her side,
A love-deluded swain, by this vile horde
Of water-fiends I should be plagued and bored."

XIII.

So poor Undiné had a double war
To wage—her frowning husband's bitter scorn,
With her despised relations' ceaseless jar—
Despised, but ah, too cunning Kühleborn!
So, harassed with much watching, and the far
More wearying spite, which her tired heart had torn,
She lay one evening in a blessed sleep,
Lulled by soft undulations of the deep;

XIV.

But scarcely had she closed her eyes, when lo!
Each voyager beheld a hideous face,
Now here, now there, its Gorgon terror throw,
Like swimmer's head, yet fastened to one place
On the clear mirror; still it seemed to go
With the barque's motion, eke with dread grimace,
'Twixt rage and laughter, every nerve benumb,
Till stiff and cold as marble they become.

XV.

Each showed to each his ghastly spectre bold—
'Tis here! 'tis there!—when suddenly the shoal
Glared upon all, and multiplied tenfold,
Till every wave became a living soul.
But now, a scream of fear, with shudder cold,
Roused up Undiné, echoing from the whole.
No sooner did she waken, than the sight
Vanished, and all the expanse lay calm and bright.

XVI.

These unremitting conflicts filled the knight
With fierce resentment—he could scarce refrain
From imprecation on this teazing blight
Of his enjoyment. His poor wife again
Besought him not to let his vengeance light
On the broad river: then would he abstain
A while. So then, in words that seemed to mourn,
She asked: "Were it not better to return,

XVII.

"And this unhappy tour abandon quite,
Which mocks the happiness we felt at home?"
She spoke beseechingly. The embittered knight
Rejoined: "Then I suppose must be my dole
A prisoner in our castle day and night
To dwell, and from its walls not dare to roam;
Nor breathe even there, unless that fount be closed—
Our frantic union!"—Here she interposed,

XVIII.

And checked his speech by placing her small hand
Upon his lips, so that the knight was mute,
And with assumed composure deeply scanned
Undiné's prohibition absolute.
While fair Bertalda waved, like fairy wand,
A necklace rich and rare, the welcome fruit
Of her dear knight's regard, which he obtained
From travelling merchant, for his much-loved friend.

XIX.

She dangled the rich jewels o'er the wave,
Pleased with their bright reflection in the stream ;
While her deep mind to cogitation gave,
On fair Undiné, wondrous as a dream,
And her terrific relatives, that drave
The knight almost to madness. While such theme
Her thoughts amuse, a monstrous hand dashed through
The crystal wave, and vanished from her view.

XX.

All this she might have borne ; but then it seized
The knight's rich present. So a piercing shriek
She uttered ; while the river-gods, well pleased,
Responsive laughed, as babbling waters break
Through narrow outlet. The good knight, appeased
Though he had been, could now no longer check
His extreme rage ; but starting, fiercely gazed
On the blue deep ; then with harsh voice upraised

XXI.

To highest pitch, a liberal volley threw
Of maledictions, and with bitter curse
On mermaid, syren, gnome and the whole crew
Of elfs and vile sea-devils: in something worse
Than common fire, he longed to make them rue
Their spiteful interference and disperse.
"Come on!" cried he, while his bright sword outflew,
That every soul of them should cut in two.

XXII.

Bertalda's tears, like oil to rising flame,
Nourished his rage. Undiné her small hand
Dipped in the wave; while a low murmuring came
From her sweet lips, mysterious and yet bland
As sleeping child's soliloquy. This train
Of speech she checked a moment, to withstand
Huldbrand's deep ire, and beg him to reclaim
Reproaches on herself, whatever blame

XXIII.

He cast on others; "for, in truth," she said,
"You know my reasons." So with utmost force,
The knight his anger bridled; nor had laid
A curse upon his bride; but nothing worse
An evil mind provokes, than when repaid
With kindness. So Undiné, in due course,
Her dripping hand drew from the crystal wave,
And a rich present to Bertalda gave.

XXIV.

"Take this, poor child," she said, "and grieve no more;
For I resolved your joy again to wake,
And so have ordered, from the boundless store
Of wealth *Plutonic*, what sea-maidens take
Such pride to wear." And truly, twas the flower
Of jewelled pride; a necklace of such make,
As might the Egyptian queen have charmed; so bright
With coral richly chased, amber* and opal white.

XXV.

But ere Bertalda grasped the glittering prize,
Huldbrand had seized it, and in wrathful spite,
Indignant hurls it in the flood; and cries:
"So then, you sorceress, you are never right
But when manœuvring with these enemies
That mar our happiness! Go, leave my sight,
With your vile presents! In the name of all
Witchcraft and magic, cease our hearts t' enthrall,

* "Farewell! be it ours to embellish thy pillow
With everything beauteous that grows in the deep;
Each flower of the rock and each gem of the billow
Shall sweeten thy bed and illumine thy sleep.

"Around thee shall glitter the loveliest amber
That ever the sorrowing sea-bird wept;
With many a shell in whose hollow-wreath'd chamber,
The Peris of ocean by moonlight slept."

MOORE.

Some of the old naturalists imagined amber to be a concretion of the tears of birds.

XXVI.

"Which are but human!" Here Undiné gazed,
With tearful eyes and hand outstretched, as when
She held her beauteous gift. She stood amazed,
And then, with heart-felt sorrow, wept amain,
Like childhood's innocence that wretch betrays
With cruel perfidy. She seemed all pain,
Powerless and nerveless; then in fainting tone
She cried: "Adieu, for every hope hath flown!

XXVII.

"But this shall harm you not, if still you're true,
Both to yourselves and me, who do repine
My youth cut down, and ne'er again shall view
The dawn of bliss; nor find that rapture mine
For which I ventured all! Once more adieu!
But bear me in your hearts with hope divine!
Ah, woe is me!" So then, like phantom light,
She vanished utterly from mortal sight,

XXVIII.

Exhaling silently, as summer dew
Blends with the solar ray, or vapour light
By the clear lake absorbed. They never knew
Whether she plunged into the stream, or quite
Melted, as wave with wave. When from their view
For ever fled, too late the headstrong knight
Shed burning tears, that seemed to scorch his brain;
Then, in a deathlike swoon, forgot the sense of pain.

CANTO XVI.

How the Knight lamented and how he consoled himself.

I.

OBJECTS beloved, when lost, are doubly dear;
Yet grief's excess is transient, or its tide
The very founts of life would overbear;
So when the o'erpowering sorrow doth subside,
The withered heart, tho' desolate and sere,
Feels to that object still more closely tied;
Mourner and mourned at length unite in one,
Or weep themselves, like Niobe, to stone.

II.

But sorrow chastened in the morning prime
Adorns the very ruin it conceals—
As wreaths perennial ivy the sublime
Decay of ancient tower and yet reveals
The touching memory of some glorious time,
More gracefully than spirit-stirring peals
Of Fame's proud trump; *this* emulation feeds,
That the true reverence for heroic deeds.

III.

Undiné mourned her lord, and mourning fled;
So he, like her, changed to a fount of grief;
For neither cheerful morn, nor western red
Of eve, nor nightly slumber brought relief
To his lone heart. The semblance of the dead
Dwelt ever in his mind; but this the chief,
Her long, imploring look with outstretched hand,
As last she stood and seemed would ever stand,

IV.

Because he loved that mage of his brain;
For should the gentle phantom quit his sight,
He would with invocation desolate remain
With outstretched hand, beseeching her not quite
His wretched heart to leave; and then again,
With a fresh flood of tears, the vanished light
Of his dear life would consecrate once more,
As those who over the cold ashes pour

V.

Libations to the dead. This could not last:
Altho' he wished the sorrow would even break
The bonds of life. These thoughts well-nigh o'ercast
His reason. Then the excess of pain would shake
To tame submission, while he nightly traced
In dreams her lovely form, that oft' would wake
Lost joys with fond caress, and then with moan
And tears would glide away, leaving her lord alone.

VI.

So when he woke, the tears lay on his cheek,
Like dew upon the ground ; but she was gone!
Ah, desolate thought! "Yet did those tears bespeak
The lady's grief, or were they but his own?"
He oft would ask ; till by degrees, so meek
His mood became, and to so gentle tone
His anguish mellowed down, that it grew sweet
To think or speak of her he never more might meet.

VII.

So long he might have lived, with life sustained
By thoughts of vanished joys, and with the kind,
The soothing sympathy of his dear friend
Bertalda, who her tears with his combined ;
She seemed resolved that evermore unstained
By rival love, that honoured shade should find
Her knight.—Then came an incident to try
Whether they *dared* alone to live and die.

VIII.

Ere long, the old fisherman the rumour heard
Of poor Undiné's exit, whom he loved
So tenderly, that soon his heart was stirred
To visit Huldbrand ; also strongly moved
His daughter to demand, for he averred
Her honour was at stake ; should it be proved
The wife deceased or lost, 'twould ne'er seem well
For her with knight unmarried thus to dwell.

IX.

But when the old man his daughter to remove
Seemed quite resolved, Sir Huldbrand could not bear
The thought of his sad house, with nought above
The frightful solitude; lone hall and stair
Would echo back his grief.—His former love
For his dear friend broke through the oppressive care,
Like a lost treasure found; so then his case
To the old sire he urged with lordly grace.

X.

But here the fisherman's extreme regard
For lost Undiné seemed to block the way;
For had her death been proved, he might have cared
Much less; but granting the cold Danube lay
Above her beauteous form, it still seemed hard
That she, the unwitting cause, should thus repay
Her generous friend by stepping in her place;
Spirits their love retain, tho' in the realms of grace.

XI.

Again, the old fisher's friendship for the knight,
Much weakened his resolve:—Bertalda, too,
Now so much changed—indeed, converted quite,
More humble and respectful hourly grew.
At length, a doubtful wrong became a right,
By contemplation from such point of view;
So after many a parley, 'twas agreed,
A courier should be sent, with utmost speed,

XII.

To Father Heilman, with the information
Of poor Undiné's death ; and that the knight
So highly prized the conjugal relation,
That he a second time resolved to try it ;
The more because the sorrowing perturbation
Of his bereavèd heart could ne'er find quiet,
If doomed in dreary solitude to die.—
So, as in happier days, the priest their hands should tie.

XIII.

The holy man this summons quick obeyed,
And to Ringstetten sped, by hope constrained ;
Journeying so fast, that with the drooping shade
Of even, he the castle court had gained ;
He also feared an idle hour delayed
Might counteract the mission entertained ;
Which was, that fitting words, at the right time,
Might yet prevent what seemed to him a crime.

XIV.

Beneath some shady trees the plighted pair
In loving converse sat ; the fisherman
Sat thoughtful by their side. With joyful air,
They all arose, and with kind welcome 'gan
To greet the holy priest, who did not share
Their feeling ; but with graver aspect than
Beseemed the occasion, briefly did desire
With the good knight a moment to retire

XV.

Within the castle. Huldbrand with surprise
Stood speechless; whereupon the holy man :—
"The words I have to say, my lord, no wise
Demand our privacy; in truth, they can
Be said as well, and that without disguise,
In presence of our friends. So better than
Delay what must be heard, I recommend
To speak it here at once, so know the end.

XVI.

"In the first place, I would this question lay
Before you: Are you sure your wife is dead?
The mystery of her present life to say
I scarcely *dare*, rather, it might be said,
I scarcely *know*. This much indeed I may
Affirm without dispute, was never maid
A more devoted wife, more kind, more true,
Than she, in holiest bond allied to you!

XVII.

"*I* cannot deem her dead, who thus have seen
Her image twice seven nights before me stand
In liveliest vision; were it but a dream?
Dreams have a cause.—Even thus, with outstretched hand,
Or prayerful clasped, beseeching me, between
Her sighs and tears, that I would countermand,
In pity to the knight, this mad design;
'For I am living still; oh, let him still be mine!

XVIII.

"'Ah, save his soul!'—Nor could my mind collate,
The meaning with the words, till I received
Your summons; so I hastened, lest too late,
If heavenly visions are to be believed,
What should not be conjoined to separate.
So, my dear friends, since you have now received
This heavenly message, may you have the grace
Your faith and love to prove, however hard the case!

XIX.

"Oh Huldbrand, leave this maid! and you, I pray,
Bertalda, as you prize all future peace,
No more dote on this knight; his looks betray
A spirit bound to one who will not cease
Her wedded lord to love.—Such traces stay
On his wan cheek, which never can efface,
Nor time, nor dallying with falsehearted love;
Oh, let that spirit's voice effectual prove,

XX.

"Which tells me that such unions never can
Be happy!"—These sad words they all receive
As truth, in clearest reason; but they ran
Counter to what would willingly believe
Their inmost hearts; therefore they all began
To struggle 'gainst conviction.—Then his leave
The good priest took, nor would a morsel taste
Of proffered food or shelter; but in haste,

XXI.

Returned ; for even the old sire became
Persuaded that such marriage must take place
As of necessity.—They jointly blame
And pity the poor priest, as of the race
Of fanatic, or dreamer, and the same
Message despatched to a more willing place,
A monk of the next convent, who agreed
The marriage to perform with utmost speed.

CANTO XVII.

The Knight's Vision.

I.

THE knight lay on his couch at early dawn,
Half-waking, half-asleep; whene'er he closed
His eyes, his sleep by spectral shape was torn
Away, or boding terror interposed
All deep repose to mar; thus was he borne
Between the two; for while he gently dozed,
A snow-white swan her cloudy wings unfurled
Over his head, while, lost to the outer world,

II.

Music, more solemn than a funeral psalm,
Was heard from these soft, hovering wings to rise;
Till somewhat of a trance, serene and calm,
Detached his spirit—straightway to the skies
Upraised;—and the melodious strains embalm
His soul, till the deep sea beneath him lies,
Profound, outstretched, immeasurably wide!
While to transparent glass its purple tide

III.

Changed as he gazed thereon, and far beneath,
Through crystal dome, he viewed with deep delight,
His lost and loved Undiné, changed from death
To purest life.—When lo! as with the blight
Of her dear hopes she wept, and every breath
Seemed a heartbreaking sigh!—At this sad sight
The knight was moved. Meanwhile old Kühleborn
Approached, regarding all her tears with scorn.

IV.

He much reproved the lady's idle grief;
But she, with rising dignity and pride,
Sharply retorted: "True, that for my chief
Offence these waters bind me; yet, allied
To deathless natures, I can find relief,
Even in my tears; for the pure spirit tied
To death-doomed matter can't be thus consign'd
For aye, but soon or late will her deliverance find."

V.

"Still, you are bound by elemental law,
Even as ourselves," replied the old uncle rude,
Shaking his head; tho' yet, impressed with awe,
By his commanding niece, he looked subdued,
And partly stunned; until some legal saw
Illumined his dull brain, with interlude
Well-timed. "If Huldbrand to his wedded wife,
Unfaithful prove, you're bound to take his life!

VI.

"Remember this, the irrevocable rule
Of all our race!"—"Ah! now, I have you there!"
Undiné said; "my lord is no such fool,
Another wife to take; tho' in despair
Lost joy to gain, his heart will never cool;
'Tis full of grief and faith that cannot bear
The thought of desecration.—To this hour
That heart I hold with love's resistless power.

VII.

"My tears are blest!—tears of a soul in thrall,
Yet boundless in its hopes!"—On this, with laugh
Of scorn, the other said: "Of what you call
A *soul* I know as much as a sea-calf;
Yours are fine notions!—But *this news*, with all
My ignorance, can tell you; a new half
Your precious spouse unto himself hath ta'en:
Full soon the holy priest will bind the twain.

VIII.

"Thus, in a few short days, 'twill be your turn
This loving husband of two wives to slay;"
Undiné answered: "I have yet to learn,
How *that* is to be done, when the sole way
Lies through that sealed up fountain. You discern
Not truth in this; but I may also say,
That I and you and all our race shall cease
Henceforth to vex my dear lord's earthly peace."

IX.

"But should he leave his castle," said the other,
"Or suffer any one that fount to loose?—
And sure, you can't suppose that he will bother
His brain about such trifles"—"I suppose,
'Tis for this cause," Undiné said, "another
Dream I bring o'er his sleep, and thus disclose
In vision all the words that pass between us,
As plain as if my lord had heard and seen us."

X.

On which old Kühleborn, with direful rage,
Looked up to earth, and seeing the slumbering knight,
Stamped wrathfully; so springing to the edge
Of the broad sea above, oh, fearful sight!
As huge leviathan he rose to wage
War on his foe; but with redoubled might,
The swans melodious their broad wings expand
O'er the vast central sea, and bear him safe to land.

XI.

For in Ringstetten Castle he awoke,
On his accustomed couch; as with the sound
The valet caused on entering, who thus spoke
His message brief: "The priest could still be found
Within the wood; some branches he had broke,
To form a sheltering booth; he frankly owned,
When questioned, why he lingered there and still
Refused obedience to his lordship's will.

XII.

" Between the altar and the tomb," said he,
" Are *other* rites that may require my art ;
All things in their due season ;—oft we see
That love and death are not so far apart.—
So let us wait awhile."—Right solemnly
He spake.—These portents too had reached the heart
Of the rash knight ; but now 'twas all arranged,
So it would never do to have things changed

CANTO XVIII.

How the Knight celebrated his Wedding.

I.

"THINGS are not what they seem," hath been well said,
By bard of high renown, and 'tis in sooth
Most obvious; for all things are overlaid
To the deluded senses, not of youth
Alone, but of all those who have not weighed
Interior causes in the light of truth,
With a deceitful varnish of mere show
That ill conceals the unhappiness below.

II.

So, if we could pourtray the imposing scene,
Ringstetten Castle on the wedding day—
The gorgeous banquet, the bewildering sheen
Of noble knights and high-born ladies gay;
Music's rich strains, the choral songs between,
Now swelling loud, now falling far away
In long-drawn cadence—we should thus impart
Truth to the eye, but falsehood to the heart.

III.

'Twas not that spectral sights their gladness marred,
For they were well secured 'gainst all intrusion
Of water-sprites at least—but then 'twas hard
That all this pomp and splendour, the profusion
Of joy's excess (yet, she alone debarred,
Who was the light of all, the interfusion
Of spiritual beauty) a new bride should greet
With welcome more resplendent than was meet

IV.

For former rival. Thus, like funeral crape
Thrown o'er gold ornaments, the splendour seemed
O'ercast with dim transparent gloom, that brake
The spring of reckless mirth. Those present deemed
The flower of all was wanting; so would make
The sound of opening door (as he had dreamed)
Each guest to start, in readiness to meet
Undiné's lovelier smile, and her sweet presence greet.

V.

Domestics came instead, with viands piled
On steaming board; or ancient butler brought
Wine of a choicer vintage; nor beguiled
All this the deepening gloom. In vain they sought
Relief in jest and banter; vainly smiled
At jokes foregone. The bride, because she thought
The least on her lost friend, seemed least to feel
Portentous sadness o'er their revels steal.

VI.

Yet o'er her mind would for a moment pass
Strange thoughts.—"Can I be here, a blooming bride,
In these proud ornaments, while she, alas!
Now pale and cold, beneath the Danube's tide,
Is to the far ocean borne?"—For thus it was
Suggested by her sire; so oft she tried
The thought to drive away, which therefore stayed
Not long, yet from her memory would not fade.

VII.

And so, at early eve, the party grew
Impatient to depart; not sent away
As newly wedded lords will sometimes do,
Impatient of constraint; they could not stay
While that portentous melancholy threw
A mocking shade that did all mirth betray;
For sense with spirit ever must unite,
Or Eden's joys would cease to yield delight.

VIII.

The wedding day thus hastened to its close,
The ladies with Bertalda glide away.
The bridegroom and attendants all arose,
But neither squire nor maiden yet were gay,
Nor strove, with well-timed frolic, to transpose
The gathering gloom, as is the accustomed way;
Yet while her maids unrobed her, the young bride
Some efforts made these portents to deride.

IX.

"Those jewels bring, the gift of my dear lord,"
She said: "those brilliant dresses, and those veils
Lighter than gossamer; we will accord
The brightest for the morrow. What avails
Gloom on these festal days, which should afford
Light only? for I cannot tell why fails
The joy of all my friends; or why so grave,
Unless their merriment they wish to save."

X.

The maids were pleased with this unlooked-for sally,
Because it loosed their tongues, and set them free
From dull constraint. Their buoyant spirits rally—
Bright ornaments are pleasant things to see
For ladies' eyes—to choose what hues would tally
Best with the beauteous bride, right heartily
They all conspire; so, free from envious qualms,
Jointly extol the bride's surpassing charms.

XI.

"Ah! but look here, these freckles on my neck,"
Bertalda said, in qualifying tone.
"Oh, these are nought," they answered; "a mere speck
To make the lily fairer. Even the sun
Is not without them; if he were, 'twould make
His splendour all the less."—"Well, all or one,
I wish them on his face," she said; "for I
Detest all blemishes most heartily."

XII.

Then, with a sigh, she added: "I could soon
Remove them; but the castle fount is sealed.
But one pure flagon; oh! for such a boon."
"That *all!*" asked she to whom her looks appealed.
So, acting to the word, she hastened down
With merry laugh. Bertalda half concealed
Her joy, her fright. "Oh, sure she'll never be
So mad, these dreadful water-sprites to free."

XIII.

Then tramp of feet they heard in the still night
Under the window: for the merry maid
A band of labourers brought. By silvery light
Of the full moon the ladies all surveyed
This reckless act. Bertalda at the sight
Grew bolder, and with cheerful smile she said:
"It is, in truth, my wish these men should do
This deed, which may we ne'er have cause to rue."

XIV.

Approving thus, she made the deed her own.
The workmen, with great effort, seemed to vie
Each with the other; but, in truth, the stone
Required not half their strength; and then a sigh
From one or two, seemed gently to bemoan
Their former mistress. Much more easily
'Twas done than they expected. *Facilis est*
Descensus, Virgil says; but we request

XV.

One syllable to change, to suit our plan:
Ascensus, in this case, for we may soon
An adverse spirit raise, but never can
Dismiss it with a word.—The soft pale moon
Shone o'er a sparkling column that began
Like prisoned bird to mount. So quick 'twas done,
They all agreed some hidden power, at length
Had raised the ponderous stone with more than mortal strength,

XVI.

They wondering gaze upon that column bright.
It seemed into a human shape to turn.
A sylph-like figure, yet so clear, so light,
The ethereal moonbeam you might well discern
Through every feature. Trembling with affright
They stood. A delicate veil was o'er her thrown;
Her hands on high she raised; once and again
Wrung them, then wept in agony of pain.

XVII.

Then crossed them on her breast, and solemnly,
Like Grecian virgin with the sacred prime
Of Ceres, slower still, reluctantly,
With head declined, she moved in funeral time,
On toward the castle gate. Soon as they see
Her form beneath the tower, with look sublime
Of heartfelt grief, with moaning voice, she raised
Her eyes aloft, and for a moment gazed.

XVIII.

Bertalda screamed—she saw Undiné's face.
"Go, call the knight!" she said: but none would dare
That call to answer; frozen to the place
With fear, her ladies stood. Up the wide stair
The figure passed with slow reluctant pace,
From hall to hall, and scattered everywhere
Tears like a summer rain. She reached the room
In which the knight stood musing o'er his doom,

XIX.

Before a mirror, with one taper dim
Beside him, and the attendants sent away.
Three light raps at the door (that playful whim
Oft heard in happier days) too well betray
Undiné's presence. "Ah! 'tis but a dream,"
He said, "of fancy. Here I cannot stay,
But to my nuptial couch must quickly move."
"Indeed you must, but a cold couch 'twill prove,"

XX.

A voice replied. He mirror'd then beheld
The reflex of the slowly opening door;
A lovely phantom, too, that softly sailed
Rather than walked, and slowly, as before,
Closing again, she, with deep sobs, bewailed
The words she fain must utter. "All is o'er,"
She said: "the fount is open. I am come
Your life to take, and lead you to your home."

XXI.

These words confirmed the death-pause in his heart.
" Ah, do not scare me in my dying hour,
With Gorgon face. Lift not that veil, nor start,
But take my life in peace." He covered o'er,
With hands close-pressed, his eyes. "Let me depart!
But not your face behold," he said, " for more
Would drive me mad." So still his heart denied
The perfect beauty of his angel-bride.

XXII.

"Alas!" the spirit said ; " will you not yet
Look on me *once* again ? I am as fair
As when on that peninsula we met."
" Ah ! would to God you were, and we might share
A kiss, like those I never can forget ;
For such a bliss my life I well could spare,
Now cheerless in false joy." She gently drew
Her veil aside, and to his ravished view,

XXIII.

Smiled, a celestial angel. " I will grant
Most willingly," she said, "your last request."
So love revived in death, and with quick pant
Of chastening awe, the knight his face addrest
That kiss to give and take. There was no want
Of rapture keen, as she more closely pressed
Her cheek to his ; yet like a streamlet bright
Her warm tears flowed, drawing such from the knight.

XXIV.

So blending tears with tears, their souls would seem
To mingle into one; but on his heart
Death struck relentless, so that joy did gleam,
Tempered with awe. 'Twas agony to part
At once with life, though such the heavenly dream,
Young love, like ceaseless sunrise, seemed to dart
Full on his soul, as slowly he sank down,
Leaned on his couch, and then that soul had flown.

XXV.

Undiné, from the apartment (now a tomb)
Glided, and to the stricken group she said:
"*Mine eyes have wept your knight to his last doom.*"
And on she slowly moved with measured tread.
They watched her progress from the adjoining room
On to the castle court, with speechless dread;
Her way to the bright moonlight fount she steered,
And in its falling waters disappeared.

XXVI.

When Father Heilman heard the doleful tale
By rumour's chance, he to the castle turned,
Where at the door he met, with aspect pale,
The monk o'ercome with horror, who confirmed
These tidings, glad to quit the heavy bale.
"It is all well!" like ancient seer, returned
For answer the good priest; "I come to afford
My aid, and need no help but from the Lord."

XXVII.

Bertalda, bride and widow in one day,
First claimed the pity of the holy man,
Who sought with kindliest interest to allay
Sorrow's excess. He, Scripture truths to scan,
Incessant strove, such as might best repay
With heavenly peace the loss of earthly gain.
Great were his pains, but small the recompense
From one whose only joys were those of time and sense.

XXVIII.

"By murderous arts of sorcery, bereaved
Am I of every hope. Enchantress vile!"
She cried, while her old sire, tho' deeply grieved,
Resigned, yet sad, replied, with patient smile,
"God's judgments with humility received
Must ever be; for I am sure the while,
Undiné, as Death's angel, ne'er could wake
Anguish beyond her own, thus doomed his life to take.

XXIX.

"I see nought in it but God's holy will,
And righteous vindication of the oppress'd.
Forlorn Undiné! retribution still
Our earthly grief imprints at His behest."
But now the last sad rites the old man's skill
And thought require; so now they all address'd
Their minds funereal matters to arrange.
Sad business which culd yet in measure change

XXX.

The current of their sorrow. 'Twas agreed
Beside the village church the knight should find
His last repose ; for there his sires were laid,
Who, with our knight, rich bounties had assigned
This shrine. The long procession was half made
By guests, retainers, villagers, combined
With escort proud of noble knights, who came
To grace his nuptial joy, not to lament his name.

XXXI.

The good priest took the lead, bearing on high
A massive crucifix ; the aged seer
Supporting his sad daughter. Many a sigh
Rose from the throng, with many a heartfelt tear.
The war-horse drooped his head, seeming to vie
With human grief. Now, on the charmèd ear,
Bursts the wild march of Death, with trumpet's blare,
And plaintive flute-notes shrilly pierce the air

XXXII.

With chérubic lament. The deep-toned gong
Marks solemn pauses, or funereal roll,
Muffled in crape, blending with clear-voiced song
Of choristers well-timed, their march control
In measured steps. But with them walked along
An unknown figure, veiled, but not in style
Of mournful black—her robes were white and fair
As mountain snow. She wrung in wild despair

XXXIII.

Her hands. Those walking near would start aside
As smit with fear; yet still she wept as one
Conscious of nought but woe. The soldiers tried
At times the stranger to remove—then gone
Like passing cloud she seemed, yet could not guide
Her course; for in some distant place anon
The phantom reappeared. At last 'twas seen
Following the widow's steps with sad but stately mien,

XXXIV.

She, all unconscious, till a circle round
The grave they form, on which Bertalda, too,
The unwelcome presence of the spirit found;
And half indignant, yet half fearful grew.
She bade the shade depart, nor dare confound
The knight's last rest. On which the phantom threw
Her arms in suppliant attitude, and then
Bertalda recognised the same again,

XXXV.

Who, on the Danube, that bright necklace gave
With such surpassing grace. She straightway shows
Relenting pity; while, with solemn wave
Of hand, the priest bade silence, and up rose
The last deep prayer; then all around the grave
Knelt solemnly. The glittering helmet glows
On the proud bier, with 'scutcheon's martial grace,
For Lord Ringstetten dies, the last of all his race.

XXXVI.

So these were buried with him. On the spot
Where the white lady knelt, a silvery spring
Rose, crystal clear, and its soft waters wrought
In eddies, that perennial dirges sing
Round the lone grave; then, slow meandering sought
The neighbouring lake. "'Tis thus her fond arms cling,"
The peasants say: "Undiné, pure and bright,
Circles for aye in this embrace her own belovèd knight."

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